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The Experiences of Dalit Students and Faculty in one Elite University in India An Exploratory Study

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**The Experiences of Dalit Students and
Faculty in one Elite University in India:
An Exploratory Study**

Samson Keyghobad Ovicegan

March 2013

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

PhD in Sociology of Education

King's College London

Abstract

Through an exploratory study undertaken in one ‘elite’ University in India, this thesis attempts to illuminate the experiences of a small set of students and faculty who are members of the Dalit caste – the so-called ‘untouchables’, who are relatively ‘successful’ in that they attend or are academics at this prestigious University. The first part of the thesis provides a background to the study; the role of caste and its enduring influence on social relations in all aspects of life; family, education, occupation, marriage, are explored and explained. The first part of the thesis also reviews one major policy designed to challenge some of the debilitating effects of caste. The Quota System policy was designed in the 1950s as an early form of affirmative action to ensure that higher education institutions retained fifteen percent of their places for Dalit students; the same proportion of faculty was also expected to come from this background.

The study then moves to a critical account of the current experiences of Dalit students and faculty in one setting; the University of Shah Jahan (pseudonym). Drawing on a set of in-depth semi-structured interviews, the empirical study that is at the centre of this thesis explores the perceptions of staff and students in relation to the Quota policy and their experiences of living, working and studying in this elite setting. The data chapters are organised in such a way as to first explore the faculty views. The experiences of students are then examined; there is a focus on the way in which their caste is still an everyday part of how they are sometimes ‘othered’. There is also a focus on the experiences of Dalit female students; an under researched cohort. Finally, the thesis turns to another under-researched matter. The Dalit are not a homogenous social group; indeed, as a consequence of the small gains made by affirmative legislation over time, such as the Quota policy, there is a new fraction of middle class Dalit that is emerging, the so-called ‘creamy layer’. The final data chapter explores the complexity involved for this relatively privileged group of Dalit in using the Quota policy to ensure access into an elite

university while sometimes ‘passing’ as not being a Dalit in order to ensure positive social relations at the University. Finally, the study considers the impact and influence of the Quota policy in terms of social justice issues and offers suggestions for further research in the area.

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Contents

<i>Abstract.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Acknowledgements.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Contents.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Overview of Thesis.....</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Chapter 1.....</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Caste, the Dalit and Education in India</i>	<i>14</i>
1. Introduction	14
2. Caste: an Historical Perspective	15
2.1 The Dalit ('Untouchables')	16
2.1.1 Origins of the 'Dalit' Caste.....	17
2.1.2 Exclusion and Discrimination – 'Race/Class and Caste'	20
3. The Caste System: Socio-Cultural Positioning in Indian Society.....	21
4. The Dalit and Education: Brief Overview of the Early Years (1850-1920).....	25
4.1 The Educational System in India: Pre- and Post-Independence (1920-1950)	27
4.2 Caste and Education: Dr. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi	29
4.3 The Post-British Educational System in India (1950 – present)	30
5. Synopsis: the Dalit and the Indian Educational System Today.....	32
7. Conclusion.....	35
A. Timeline on the legislative framework for affirmative action in education in the context of economic and political changes including the rise of Dalit activism and the formation of the Dalit Institute.	36
B. International Conventions on Dalit Equal Education Rights.....	37
<i>Chapter 2</i>	<i>38</i>
<i>A Critical Exploration of the Quota System Policy and Related Social Justice Issues</i>	<i>38</i>
Introduction.....	38
2. Initiation of Constitutional Policies for the Dalit	39
2.1 Quota System - Legal Position	41
2.2 Quota System Policy Initiatives for Dalits in Higher Education.....	42
2.3 Quota Policy and Social Justice.....	47
2.3.1 Towards a Theory of Social Justice	48
2.3.2 Theoretical Dimensions of Social Justice in the Context of the Dalit Community	49
2.3.3 Forms of Justice and the Dalit	53
2.4 The Logic of Merit: Arguments 'For' and 'Against'	61
2.4.1 Meritocracy in Higher Education: Philosophical Rationale.....	61
2.5 Opposition to the Quota System Policies	65

2.6 Cultural Injustice	67
2.7 Outcomes of Quota Policy in Practice - Dalit Recruitment Patterns	71
2.8 Discussion	75
Chapter 3	79
<i>The Dalits in Higher Education: a Research Perspective</i>	79
3. Introduction	79
3.1 The Dalit Situation.....	80
3.2 Peopling the Research: the Dalit Situation in Higher Education.....	84
3.2.1 Locating Research Studies on the Dalit (1970s).....	84
3.2.2 Situated Studies in Rural and Small Urban Regions (1980s – mid-2000s) ...	85
3.2.3 Research Studies on Dalit Females in Higher Education	91
3.3 Critical Analysis – Call for Further Research.....	96
3.4 Rationale for My Research on Dalit in Higher Education.....	100
Chapter 4	102
<i>Methodology</i>	102
4. Introduction and Research Questions	102
4.1 Rationale for a Qualitative Methodology	103
4.1.1 Ontology and epistemology influencing the methodological choices	106
4.2 Methods	110
4.2.1 Case Study	110
4.3 Context.....	113
4.3.1 Setting: The University of Shah Jahan	113
4.3.2 Access to Participants and Presence in the Field.....	114
4.3.3 Pilot Study	117
4.3.4 Sample and Sample Construction	119
4.3.5 Research Tools Employed	122
4.3.5.1 Interview and fieldwork data	122
4.3.5.2 In the field	128
4.4 Coding and Analysis	129
4.5 Ethical Issues	131
4.5.1 Reflexivity	133
4.5.2 Positionality	137
4.6 Summary	140
Chapter 5	143
<i>Faculty Voices: The Role of the Quota System, Caste Power and Discrimination</i>	143
5. Introduction	143
5.1 Accounting for Dalit Experiences	147
5.2 Dalit Faculty Members' Experiences of the Quota System in Higher Education	148
5.2.1 The Implementation of the Quota System Policy: Strengths	149
5.2.2 Quota Reservation Policy: Limitations	155
5.2.3 Problems Associated With Merit	157

5.3 Power, Dominance and Corruption.....	161
5.3.1 Brief Overview of Caste Power in Higher Education	161
5.3.2 Issues of Dominance and Control.....	163
5.3.3 The Problem of Corruption.....	165
5.4 Discrimination	167
5.4.1 Caste Mind-set.....	168
5.4.2 Prejudice Among Faculty Members: Issues and Concerns.....	170
5.4.3 Dalit and Non-Dalit Faculty: Their Relationship and Rapport.....	173
5.4.4 Discrimination and Non-Dalit Students.....	179
5.4.5 Gender and Discrimination: The Experiences of Dalit Female Faculty Members.....	181
5.4.6 Coping with Discrimination.....	186
5.5. Strategies for Coping/Survival.....	187
5.6. Discussion and Conclusion.....	191
Chapter 6	194
<i>Dalit Students' Perceptions of the Quota Policy and their Experiences at the University of Shah Jahan.....</i>	<i>194</i>
6. Introduction	194
6.1 Perceptions of the Quota System	199
6.1.1 'Tensions' – Students' Views and Experiences of the Quota Policy.....	199
6.1.1.1 Positive Support for the Quota Policy	199
6.1.1.2 Dalit Students' Views of the Disadvantages of the Quota Policy	201
6.1.1.3 Tensions between Dalit/non-Dalit around the Quota Policy	204
6.2 Dalit Students' Experiences in the University of Shah Jahan.....	207
6.2.1 Non-Dalit Tutors.....	207
6.2.2 Non-Dalit Peers	209
6.2.2.1 In classrooms.....	209
6.2.2.2 Outside classrooms: in hallways, and the broader social environment ...	210
6.2.2.3 Positive rapport with non-Dalit individuals.....	214
6.2.3 University Admissions	216
6.2.3.1 Application process.....	216
6.2.3.2 Interviews	218
6.2.3.3 Admissions procedure	219
6.2.4 Merit	221
6.2.4.1 Meritocratic selection	221
6.2.4.2 Compensation	225
6.2.4.3 Issues surrounding social justice in Shah Jahan	226
6.3 Formal and Informal Encounters.....	230
6.3.1 Formal Experiences – the Quota Policy as Socially Just	230
6.3.2 Experiences of Exclusion.....	234
6.4 Discussion and Conclusion.....	236
Chapter 7	242
<i>The Experience of Being a Female Dalit Student at the University of Shah Jahan.....</i>	<i>242</i>

7. Introduction	242
7.1 The Status of Women in Indian Society.....	245
7.1.1 Dalit Women's Identity in Contemporary Indian Society.....	247
7.1.2 Differences in Identity Between and Among Dalit Women	252
7.1.3 Experiences of 'Dalit Identity' among Female Students in the University of Shah Jahan.....	253
7.2 Issues of Access and Participation for Female Dalit Students at the University of Shah Jahan	257
7.2.1 The Quota System and Female Dalit Students' Access to Shah Jahan.....	257
7.2.2 Cultural and Societal Pressures Influencing Dalit Women's Access to and Participation in Higher Education.....	259
7.2.3 Cultural and Social Pressures Placed on Dalit Females	261
7.3 Views and Experiences of Dalit Females at the University of Shah Jahan.....	265
7.3.1 Tutors' Attitudes towards Dalit Female Students.....	265
7.3.2 Relations with Non-Dalit Male and Female Colleagues In and Outside the Classroom.....	267
7.3.3 University Student Counselling Centre.....	270
7.4 Inclusion and Exclusion in the University	272
7.4.1 Social Justice Concerns in Relation to the Experiences of Dalit Female Students	272
7.4.2 Practices of Integration and Segregation.....	275
7.5 Conclusion	279
Chapter 8	283
<i>Positioning Dalit Caste Relations and the Quota Policy:</i>	<i>283</i>
<i>A Critical Analysis</i>	<i>283</i>
8. Introduction	283
8.1 The Dalit Caste.....	288
8.1.1. Emergence of the 'Creamy-Layer' Dalit.....	288
8.2 Tension between Dalits in Higher Education	290
8.2.1 Competition for Quota Seats between Dalits in Higher Education – University of Shah Jahan	291
8.2.2 Scheduled Caste (Dalit) Certificate: Tensions and Conflicts Surrounding the Certification Process for Quota Seats in University Education.....	296
8.3 Characteristics of the Lives of Dalit at the University of Shah Jahan.....	300
8.3.1 Creamy-layer Dalit versus Quota Dalit Students: Issues and Challenges Faced in their Experience of Higher Education.....	301
8.4 Caste Divisions between Dalit Students in the University Environment.....	305
8.4.1 The Dalit: Internal Caste Divisions and Differences	306
8.5 Emerging Concerns for Dalits in Higher Education	310
8.5.1 Class Differences between Dalit Students	310
8.5.2 Educational Competition	312
8.5.3 Regional and Language Divisions between Dalit Students.....	316
8.5.4 Challenges to Dalit Unity	318
8.6 Discussion and Conclusion.....	320

Chapter 9	327
Summary and Conclusions.....	327
9. Introduction	327
9.1 Summary/Restatement of Aims	327
9.2 Contributions.....	329
9.2.1 Research Findings	329
9.2.2 Significance of Findings.....	330
9.3 Methodology	333
9.3.1 Reflection on Methods	334
9.4 Implications of the Research Study.....	336
9.4.1 Possible Implications.....	336
9.4.2 Issues to Consider.....	340
9.5 Limitations of the Current Study	341
9.6 Recommendations for Further Research on Dalits in Higher Education	344
9.6.1 Further research on the complex and differentiated experiences of Dalits.....	346
9.6.2 Large-scale and comparative studies of the social exclusion of the Dalit community in different states and contexts in India.....	348
9.7 Need for Political Involvement for Dalit Upliftment.....	350
9.7.1 Prospective Strategies for Dalit in India	351
9.7.2 The significance of giving a ‘voice’ to subjugated communities	352
9.8 Concluding Remarks	355
Bibliography.....	359
APPENDIX A: Ethical Approval.....	380
APPENDIX B: Information Sheet.....	381
APPENDIX C: Consent Form	383
APPENDIX D: Interview Questions	384
APPENDIX E: Interview Transcript (UNCODED).....	387
APPENDIX F: Data Coding.....	388
APPENDIX G: Open Coding of Interviews.....	391
APPENDIX H: Interview Transcript (UNCODED)	392
APPENDIX I: Interview Data Coding	393
APPENDIX J: Open Coding of Interviews	396
APPENDIX K: Table on Number of Student Participants and Courses.....	397
APPENDIX L: Tables on Dalit Enrolment in Education.....	398
APPENDIX M: Letter to the Head of Department.....	401

Overview of Thesis

This research study explores and analyses the current ‘grounded’ experiences and situation of Dalit (i.e., both students and faculty), in one elite Indian University. The first three chapters provide a contextual framework for the thesis. Chapter 1 discusses the caste system in its historical perspective, together with the socio-cultural role of caste and its impact on contemporary educational systems. The chapter also considers the pre- and post-British educational system in India, caste conflict in the present day, and the effect of that conflict on the Indian educational system.

In the second chapter, the thesis raises questions about the nature and causes of discrimination against Dalits in their academic lives. The chapter seeks to situate caste bias in relation to the Dalit caste, and to explore the skewed patterns which characterise Dalit recruitment into the social context of higher educational institutions in India. The chapter makes use of the existing literature on caste bias in its discussion of the constitutional ‘Quota system’ initiatives implemented to improve Dalit access to higher education in India. Most significantly, the chapter identifies contested issues of meritocracy in light of the Quota system policies, and uses social justice theory as a framework to explore the experiences of Dalit respondents (students and staff) at the University of Shah Jahan.

Chapter three examines existing research on Dalit access to higher education, and explores issues of bias prevalent in the environment of higher education. The chapter offers a critical analysis of research gaps in this area by means of an extensive literature review, and highlights the lack of attention paid to the issue of Dalits studying at ‘Ivy League’ institutions in India.

The fourth chapter explores the methodology of the thesis as a whole, and sets out the framework required for carrying out the research. The research methods used were qualitative in nature, in order to enable the researcher to investigate individual experiences in a grounded and ethnographic manner. In the course of the research, interviews were carried out to explore the experiences of the Dalit respondents within the context of the University of Shah Jahan. Chapter 4 also considers the ethical issues involved in pursuing this particular avenue of research, as well as some of the limitations the study has encountered. The next four chapters are data-driven.

The fifth chapter explores and examines the experiences of Dalit faculty members and the low-level but continual discrimination perpetuated by some non-Dalit staff against their Dalit colleagues in academic departments. This chapter also foregrounds issues of discrimination against Dalit female academics by both Dalit and non-Dalit academic staff. The chapter explores the nuances of caste-based discrimination prevalent within the academic sphere of the University of Shah Jahan. It considers the hegemonic dominance of high-caste non-Dalit faculty members within the university's administration, management and classrooms, and the role this might play in 'othering' Dalit members of staff.

The sixth chapter discusses the responses of Dalit students at the university. This case study of Dalit students in the University of Shah Jahan locates and offers insights into the caste divisions which structure life in a university setting. Close attention is paid to the tensions surrounding the issue of the Quota system as a whole, and its advantages and disadvantages for the Dalit community. The chapter explores the extent to which caste-based hegemony is present in both the university as a whole and the classroom environment. The respondents' encounters with non-Dalit tutors and students within and outside classroom settings are discussed. Analysis of the interview data from the Dalit students reveals the behaviour of non-

Dalit individuals at the university to evince oppressive forms of caste prejudice. In addition, Chapter 6 investigates the workings of caste bias within university admissions procedures, including the systems in place for application and interview. Issues of meritocratic selection, compensation and social injustice are shown to have emerged very clearly in the course of the study.

Chapter seven discusses the discriminatory practices associated with gender, caste and class that Dalit women encounter in a higher educational setting. Issues of gender in relation to Dalit females and their participation in higher education are explored. In the light of the empirical evidence gathered, the differences between and among Dalit women are analysed, with particular attention paid to the aspects of Dalit female identity endorsed by caste culture, and reinforced through caste-biased practices at many levels of society. This chapter addresses the challenges posed by social perceptions of the issue of Dalit female education; issues of inclusion and exclusion in university life; the role of family and society in structuring Dalit females' academic aspirations; their interactions with peers and tutors; and, more broadly, social justice concerns about integration and segregation in university life.

Chapter eight explores and critically assesses the internal structure of the Dalit caste with reference to the emergence of a separation between 'creamy-layer' and non-'creamy-layer' Dalits, and the different experiences of these two groups within the learning environment. The chapter investigates the tensions and conflict surrounding the Scheduled Caste certification process for Quota seats in university education, and highlights the differing opinions of Dalit respondents to the implications of this certification process. The chapter uncovers internal divisions between members of the Dalit caste, including class differences, educational competition, and regional and linguistic differences – all of which pose a significant challenge to unity within the Dalit community and point to the need for careful differentiation within the category of 'Dalit'.

The final chapter presents a summation of the investigative study, and synthesises the research findings. The chapter reflects on the analytical approach utilised for this study, and considers the significance of its findings for the experiences of Dalits in higher education – both students and faculty. This chapter also assesses the contribution of the thesis in terms of empirical evidence, and identifies issues of particular relevance that have arisen in the process of conducting this study. Finally, the chapter highlights the limitations of this explorative study, and identifies areas which merit further investigation from researchers.

Chapter 1

Caste, the Dalit and Education in India

1. Introduction

For many centuries, the “hegemonic cultural system” of caste has dominated the Indian sub-continent, shaping the consciousness and life experiences of Indians in various ways (Shah *et al.*, 2006, p. 35). Caste hierarchy structures India’s social, cultural, economic and political systems, and in each case discriminates against individuals of the lowest caste, who are known as the ‘Dalit’ (Prasad, 2006). Despite the lip-service paid to egalitarianism and equality in Indian society, prejudice and segregation have long been part of the Dalit experience (Vasavi, 2008). Dalit communities continue to be restricted in their access to social benefits such as education, which in turn restricts their wider participation in Indian society and limits their opportunities in life (Chalam, 2007).

In the present chapter, attention will be drawn to the Indian caste system: its history and socio-cultural implications, with particular emphasis on the Dalit caste. Second, the chapter will outline Dalit participation in India’s educational system before and after independence from British rule, from the 1920s to the present day. Third, the chapter will describe the implications of caste divisions today, and their influence on the Indian educational system. Finally, this chapter will consider the situation of the Dalit in relation to higher education. The intention in this first chapter is to provide a context and background for the thesis.

2. Caste: an Historical Perspective

The word 'caste' comes from "the Portuguese word 'casta', signifying breed, race or kind" (Shah *et al.*, 2006, p. 35). In the eleventh century, India's Portuguese colonisers applied the term indiscriminately to a range of social and professional groups within the Indian sub-continent. Their designations are largely sustained today (Sunderaj, 2000, p. 37). The caste system in India is "a distinctive social structure", with few parallels in other cultures around the world (Prasad, 1986, p. 39). In approximately 1500 BCE, the ancient Vedas (Hindu holy scriptures) depicted the caste system in its nascent form. According to the *Rig-Veda*, the gods divided the body parts of a human sacrifice, naming his "mouth the Brahmins, his arms the Kshatriya, his thighs the Vaishya, and his feet the Shudra"; the Dalit were located outside this physiological model of caste (Haslam, 1999, p. 9). The Dalit became known as pariahs, meaning 'outcastes'; they belonged to the *chatur-varna* scheme of social stratification, which designated them as Panchamas (the fifth caste). As such, the Dalit were often referred to as 'untouchable' or 'outcaste' (Rao, 2007, p. 21).

Caste distinctions delineated the socio-economic functions to be fulfilled by different castes. The Brahmins (first caste) were usually considered responsible for preaching and conveying the content of religious texts to the illiterate masses. The Kshatriyas (second caste) led in the areas of social welfare and governmental administration. The Vaisyas (third caste) were required to gain mathematical knowledge and skills for their role in business and accounting. Members of the fourth and last caste, the Sudras, were relegated to artisanal work and manual labour (Rao, 2007). Outside the caste system, the 'untouchables' or Dalit were excluded altogether from social and educational privileges, and were often employed as manual workers or scavengers, held responsible for performing the "lowliest tasks such as cleaning latrines and working in sewers" (Rao, 2007, p. 24).

2.1 The Dalit ('Untouchables')

The Dalit constitute about 16.2% (more than 200 million) of the Indian population (Thorat, 2009). In spite of some efforts on the part of various governments to ameliorate the condition of the Dalit, this social group is still the “poorest and most subordinated in Indian society by any measure of human development” (Thorat, 2009, p. 1). In the *Manusmriti*, one of India’s ancient Hindu texts, the Dalit caste is described as ‘polluted’ and ‘unclean’ from birth. The word ‘Dalit’, meaning ‘crushed underfoot’ or ‘broken into pieces’, is the contemporary version of the word ‘untouchable’. ‘Dalit’ is “not a class term but a caste term” (Patankar, 1999, p. 111). The word gained currency in the 1930s as a Hindi and Marathi translation of ‘Depressed Classes’, the term used by the British for the communities now known as the ‘Scheduled Castes’ (SC) and ‘Scheduled Tribes’ (ST).

The Scheduled Castes (SC) and the Scheduled Tribes (ST) are mentioned and included by the former drafting Chairman, Dr. Ambedkar, in the Constitution of India (Thorat, 2009). The complete listing of the Dalit caste were formed by means of two orders - The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) “Order of 1950,” and The Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) “Order of 1958.” The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950 records “1,108 castes across 25 Indian States,” while the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1958 lists “744 tribes across 22 Indian States” (Thorat, 2009, p. 4). Also, the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes is an Indian statutory body which was then established in 2003 and for the Scheduled Castes (SC) in 2004 (cited from the National Commission for Scheduled Castes, Jogdand, 2007; Thorat, 2009). Additionally, Article 341 of the Indian Constitution authorises the President of India to specify particular castes as SCs (Scheduled Castes). The term refers to “such castes, races or tribes or parts of or groups within castes, races, or tribes as are deemed under Article 341 of the Constitution to be of the Scheduled Castes” (Thorat, 2009, pp. 1-2).

However, in this thesis I will use the term ‘Dalit/Dalits’ rather than ‘Dalit (SC/ST)’. The existing literature makes use of both attributions; however, according to the terms of the Quota System, “Dalit are enlisted as Scheduled Castes (SC), and Scheduled Tribes (ST), and these by and large fall under the categories of being termed a ‘Dalit’” (Kumar, 1999, p. 52); or “the legal designation for ‘Dalits’” (Hart, 2010). Furthermore, the Dalit do not have a homogeneous culture and history, and, as such, their grouping together as ‘Dalit’ is solely for the ease of “sociological and political analysis” (Gnanaraj & Krishnamurthy, 2000, p. 11). The preference for the term ‘Dalit’ does not, therefore, deny the heterogeneity of their communities.

It is also important to note the diversity of the Dalit community, which is divided into hundreds of sub-castes (Sunderaj, 2000; D’Souza, 2008; see discussion in Chapter 8) spread across different regions in India. Analysis of the Dalits' social situation in Chapter 8 and elsewhere will take account of this diversity by examining the rise of the ‘creamy layer’ (elite class) of Dalits, who – by means of the constitutional provisions made by the Quota policy – have achieved educational mobility, enhanced their socio-economic status, and thereby reached the top of the Dalit community (Jenkins 2003, p. 82; Rana, 2008). The poorer and more underprivileged Dalits will be termed ‘Quota’ Dalits (as discussed in Chapter 8) for the purposes of comparative analysis.

2.1.1 Origins of the ‘Dalit’ Caste

According to the ancient Indian legal code of Manu, untouchability was the punishment meted out to a child born of the union of a high-caste (Brahmin) individual with a member of a low caste (Sudra). The off-spring of such unions came to be known as ‘untouchables’. The consequences were yet more severe when the “father was of a low caste, and the mother of a superior caste” (Michael, 2007, pp. 16-17). The literature of the early twentieth century offered other explanations

for the origin of an ‘untouchable’ caste. Dr. Ambedkar, for example, who campaigned for the rights of untouchables, was of the opinion that marginalised men and women from the Shudra caste also came to be treated as untouchables (Ambedkar, 1948).

Today, the term ‘Dalit’ is used in a positive manner to reject any “idea of pollution, impurity, or untouchability”, and it reflects a unified class movement against inequality (Michael, 2007, p. 33). It is an indigenous word used in Marathi, Bengali, Hindi, and many other modern Indian languages; and many present-day Dalit leaders “actively choose to be referred to as ‘Dalit’” (Ghosh, 1999; Mohanty, 2003; Webster, 2007, p. 76). The term came into widespread currency in the “mid-1970s through the Dalit Panther movement” (Guru and Chakravarty, 2005, p. 144). It was chosen deliberately by the Panthers, and used proudly. Dr. Ambedkar (activist and leader of the Dalit liberation movement) converted the negative identity of the ‘untouchable’ caste into the political potentiality and agency of the Dalit. Dr. Ambedkar first used the term ‘Dalit’ in 1928, in his journal ‘Bahishkrit Bharat’ (‘Outcaste India’), where he characterised the Dalit experience as one of deprivation, marginalisation and stigmatisation. The name ‘Dalit’ came to signify a “suffering and revolutionary agent” (Rao, 2009, p. 15).

The roots of India’s caste hierarchy lie in the ancient ‘Varna’ system. The four Varnas exemplified a theoretical social structure, while the ‘Jāti’ (often translated as ‘relationships’) reflected the actual functioning of society. In fact, Jāti is better translated as caste. Varna defined an individual’s rank, while Jāti described status, allowing any position within the hierarchy to be assigned clearly and easily. Caste organisation was thus “a system of shielding the division of authority and control through reserving the scarce social goods, like education and administration for those in power, and menial work for those without power” (Prasad, 1986, p. 40). Nirula (2005) quotes from *Manu* X: 97 (also known as *Manu-samhita* or *Manusmriti*), which states that:

... it is better that one should live by doing the vile works allotted to his caste than embrace the vocation of a superior caste for livelihood – living by adopting the vocation of another caste, one becomes degraded that very day. (p. 58)

With the Varna system operating as a form of religious control, India's caste hierarchy has survived for an extended period of time. Due to this enduring stratification of society, members of the lower castes have suffered “persistent and undue discrimination”, resulting in their educational and economic marginalisation (Nirula, 2005, p. 99).

The caste system attributes to each individual a fixed status; levels of power and privilege vary according to birth. Even if an individual were to secure a high level of educational and/or economic status, their caste would remain, on the whole, an “integral part of their identity” (Prasad, 1986, p. 41). Put simply, Caestine Bough describes the Varna system as predicated on three primary values: “hereditary specialization, hierarchy and repulsion, or isolation of one group from another” (cited in Jaiswal, 1998, p. 33).

DeLeige (1997) argues that caste is integral to Indian society and its institutions, so much so that “Dalits rarely consider opposing the system into which they are integrated” (p. 106). The anthropologist Hutton believes that caste difference originated in the division of labour by the ‘pre-Aryan’ tribes of India. According to Hutton, ‘untouchability’ is the outcome and consequence of ritual uncleanness. The origin of the Dalits, he argues, is partly racial (due to alleged physical appearance), partly religious (due to differences in belief), and partly a matter of social norms and customs (Hutton, 1963). Although economic inequality and differences in status continue to afflict many developed societies, the concept of ‘untouchability’ is particular to India, with its roots in the country's ancient Varna

system (Prasad, 1986, p. 40). Thorat (2009) describes untouchability as a social concept which has become “embodied in customs” in India (p. 2).

Chitnis (1997) identifies the outcastes’ predicament with the use of the term ‘untouchability’ (p. 95). In October 1909, the Maharaja of Baroda used the term ‘untouchable’ while addressing the Depressed Classes Mission in Bombay. However, this attribution was abolished in 1950 under Article 16 of the Indian Constitution. According to the Untouchability Offence Act of 1955, the practice of untouchability and discrimination in public places was an offence. In 1976, the Act was reviewed in order to make it more “stringent and effective and was designated the Protection of Civil Rights (PCR) Act” (Thorat, 2009, p. 12). The execution of policies concerning the eradication of untouchability is the responsibility of both central and state governments in India. The Ministry of Home Affairs “formulates such policies and controls” their implementation (Paswan & Jaideva, 2003, p. 170). Although the Dalit are no longer officially designated ‘untouchables’, in practice many Dalit still endure the effects of the “stigma they have been forced to live with for a century” (Rao, 2007, p. 21). Even today, the Hindu “caste hierarchy prevails in India” (Verma, 2005, p. 256).

2.1.2 Exclusion and Discrimination – ‘Race/Class and Caste’

The Dalit have been excluded and discriminated against over time. This exclusion is related to issues of ‘race’ and class to some extent; ‘race’ on the basis that a specific group is treated differently on the basis of some inferred similarity. Thus people of minority heritage are frequently punished as ‘other’ and remain positioned at the ‘bottom’ of society (Thorat, 2009). In the 1996 reports to the ICERD (International Convention to End All Forms of Racial Discrimination) the Indian Government argued that Dalits did not fall under the purview of the ICERD because “‘caste’ implies class or social distinction and does not denote racial difference” (Hart, 2010, p. 52). Therefore in 2002 CERD - The UN’s Committee to

End Racial Discrimination adopted - “General Recommendation XXIX on ‘descent-based discrimination’ [which] includes discrimination against members of communities based on forms of social stratification as caste and analogous systems of inherited status which nullify or impair their equal enjoyment of human rights” (Hart, 2010, p. 52).

It is social stratification that characterizes the exclusions experienced by the Dalit of India. This discrimination and exclusion is also based to some extent on socio-economic factions. Dalit’s from less economically advantaged backgrounds are likely to experience a direct and open hostility. Dalit’s who come from a more economically advantaged background may experience slights, exclusions and reduced opportunities. However the differences between caste exclusions and discriminations faced by the Dalit compared with the exclusions of ‘race’ and class that are experienced in Western societies are more profound. Caste prejudice is justified through aspects of Hinduism. Thus, religion is used to support and sustain caste-bias, and this ideology is maintained in the dominant Indian political parties. No Western governments pay lip-service or support exclusion and discrimination; rather they seek in rhetoric and policy to move towards inclusion. The Dalit of India are excluded through history, religion, politics, and ‘mind-set’ – this is a very different and totalising form of oppression.

3. The Caste System: Socio-Cultural Positioning in Indian Society

The caste system is an intrinsic feature of Hindu society in India, based on unequal entitlement to economic and social rights. Indian society is typified by divisions of caste, class, religion, region and sex, with caste the most influential social parameter of all. Hindus make up nearly 82% of the population. Other, non-Hindu groups are also characterised under the terms of the caste system, and the term ‘caste’ as used in this study applies to all of these groups. Caste or ‘Jāti’ refers to an

endogenous group with hereditary membership. It is easy to identify the castes at the top and the bottom of the hierarchy. It is more difficult, however, to outline a nationwide system of castes, because the position of each is rooted in regional culture. Caste inequality is both the cause and the consequence of the exclusion and discrimination that have been practised throughout India's history against certain groups and castes, particularly the Dalit. These groups are denied their rights in a multitude of societal relations and interactions: economic, social, political and cultural. This gross discrimination has resulted in widespread deprivation and poverty for the Dalits, who have traditionally been placed at the "bottom rung of the caste hierarchy" (Thorat, 2009, p. 9). Sharma (1999) claims that many Indians, even today, believe in a hierarchical notion of "purity and pollution" constructed along caste divisions (p. 39).

Caste movements in India have been led by notable 'outcaste' (Dalit) activists, campaigning against the discriminatory practices and socio-cultural hegemony of the 'upper castes' (Brahmins) (Sharma, 1999). The activists' primary concern has been to secure equality of human rights. Their resistance is directed against the autocratic rule of the upper castes, who have, in turn, frequently sought support and sanction for caste distinctions from socio-religious authorities, and even sometimes from "law approved in the Hindu religious canon" (Sharma, 1999, p. 17). Historically, those at the top of the caste hierarchy have taken precedence in access to education, bureaucratic control and political power. Today, these groups continue to "enjoy advantages over others" (Chalam, 2007, p. 62). Sivalingum (1999) observes that the strength of the caste system lies in "devious manipulation [...] through the use of Hindu religious texts", by means of which Brahmins (high-castes) have acquired, unopposed, the privileges of that system, prioritising and claiming legitimacy for their rights above those of the rest of society (p. 121).

Despite vociferous demonstrations in favour of caste abolition, India's upper castes continue to benefit from the privileges of caste ranking, and thus sustain a vested

interest in the system's continuation. Chalam (2007) believes that caste hierarchy will continue to thrive unless Indian society undergoes a "radical transformation minimizing traditional control over modern education" (p. 63). Undeniably, the effects of caste hierarchy continue to hinder the progress of the socially disadvantaged Dalit, who are often alienated from "mainstream formal education according to the same religious" pretexts that impede their access, more broadly, into mainstream culture and society (Verma and Singh, 2005, p. 317).

Rao (2007) claims that the reproduction of Indian culture through education plays a "key role in the reproduction of the whole system" (p. 158). In turn, the Indian caste system has influenced education by shaping what Singh (2002) terms a "regimented social disparity increasing educational disproportion" (p. 47). Social discrimination is thus reproduced via the medium of education. So-called educational 'marginalisation' is one of the traditional tools employed by high castes to sustain their hegemony over those of a lower caste: historically, within the Hindu social order, education was restricted to high castes. Gnanaraj and Krishnamurthy (2000) claim that individuals at the top of the caste hierarchy have frequently also taken "control of the faculties of education and research" (p. 61).

The Dalit continue to experience social discrimination, which includes being refused access to goods, services, and learning institutions by both individuals and governmental bodies (Jogdand, 2007). The hoped-for implementation of laws to safeguard their rights has, in practice, been insufficient (Mendelsohn & Baxi, 1994; Singh, 2002). Many Dalit have no access to universities, and those who do gain access to higher education may face discrimination from their non-Dalit peers and tutors (Kundal, 2005). Illiteracy within the Dalit caste stands at 73%, against the national literacy level of around 50%. Issues of inaccessibility and caste bias affecting Dalit in schools and higher education continue to find expression in the dominant attitudes of Indian society (Pillai, 1999; Kundal, 2005). For example, the Indian newspaper *The Frontline* published as recently as 2006 an article entitled

‘Education and Discrimination’ which stated that “no Dalit should be educated, or apply for government jobs”.

In order to right the injustices perpetrated against the Dalit, the Indian government has been expected to make more effort to stop the practice of caste discrimination. Many Dalit social activists have welcomed and appreciated government efforts in this direction; however, political bureaucrats headed by high-caste Hindus have rejected the plea for change, stating that policy makers lack a sense of balance on the subject of caste discrimination (Shivam, 2007). At the level of government, caste tradition holds significant sway, with little or no allowance made for the plight of the Dalit community (Nambissan, 2002). Unfortunately, many educational institutions under government management and supervision show a similarly dismal lack of action. Gynanaraj and Krishnamurthy (2000) observe that caste discrimination, even “among educators, is still alive and active” (p. 60).

Due to such discrimination, the Dalit are faced with a series of social restrictions, especially in rural towns and their small urbanised counterparts. In 1999, Haslam found that 91% of the Dalit interviewed for his study were unable to visit the barber-shops used by those of a higher caste; 93% reported being unable to visit the tea shops used by other castes; and 91% to visit village shops (p. 31). Access to health care, including clinics and hospitals, is often denied to Dalit individuals. Even in large towns, the Dalit are frequently prevented from making use of basic amenities. Dalit doctors, engineers, and professors may be refused rental homes, especially in high-caste areas. Landlords commonly put up signs saying that rentals are “only for vegetarians”; symbolic of and synonymous with Brahmins (high caste). Reddy *et al.* (2004) report that even in “urban settlements Dalit are made to live apart from [people of] other caste[s]” (p. 107). When Dalits are permitted to move into predominantly non-Dalit areas, they are likely to be culturally and socially isolated, and their children are often discouraged from making acquaintances among children of other castes. What is evident is that the caste

system works in many settings to ensure that the Dalit inhabit the lowest socio-cultural position in Indian society (Chalam, 2007).

4. The Dalit and Education: Brief Overview of the Early Years (1850-1920)

I shall now offer a brief exploration of Dalits' experiences of education over time. First, under Peshwa rule in the 1850s, the Dalit were completely outside the reach of education. The Peshwa government was theocratic, based on the canon of Manu, according to which the Dalit were deprived of the right to education. The British, at this time, were silent on the “question of promoting education among the native population” (Paswan & Jaideva, 2004, p. 35). No schools were opened for the so-called Depressed Classes before 1855, as British policy aimed explicitly to restrict the benefits of higher education to the upper castes. The antipathy of European officers towards ‘untouchables’ was eventually “corrected by the Secretary to the Indian government in 1859, when schools were opened” for the Dalit (Paswan & Jaideva, 2004, p. 37). From 1854 onwards, measures were taken to provide education for the Indian population en masse, “irrespective of caste and creed” (Paswan & Jaideva, 2004, p. 36). However, Paswan and Jaideva (2004) assert that in the early nineteenth century, there were “no students from Dalit communities either in high schools or in colleges” (p. 37).

The inequality and oppression stemming from India's caste system was eventually challenged by Jotirao Phule (1826-1890), who sought to secure the “social improvement of the oppressed caste”; that is, the Dalit (Hooda, 2001, p. 165). Phule was the first person to state publicly that India needed to rebuild and reform the Hindu caste/social order on the basis of equal opportunities for the subjected Dalit caste. He believed that “education was a weapon to bring about a culture of revolution” (cited in Anand, 2005, p. 119). Phule believed that the entire educational machinery of India, both ministerial and executive, should be in the

hands of the government. He argued that both primary and higher education required a “level of care and consideration which only the government is capable” of bestowing (Sharma, 1999, p. 98). In the 1860s, Phule made the lower classes of Hindus conscious of their slavery to the higher castes, preaching that social democracy in India was “more vital than independence from foreign rule” (Webster, 2007, p. 112).

Nambissan (2002) reports that early Christian missionaries played a crucial role in the early education of Dalit caste communities, running schools expressly for that purpose. The Dalits’ increased participation in education encouraged the colonial rulers to implement the Caste Removal Act of 1850, which authorised the “establishment of some separate schools and government scholarships” for Dalit children (Shah *et al.*, 2006, p. 45). A policy of protective discrimination was initiated with the Woods Dispatch of 1854, permitting education for all castes. However, the upper castes disliked the policy and were vociferous in their protests against mixed classrooms of Dalit and higher-caste children. This protest resulted in the government’s Report on Education in India in 1883, which recommended the “setting up of separate schools for both upper caste and Dalit children” (Rao, 2007, pp. 158-159).

The early twentieth century marked the beginning of a slow increase in educational opportunities for many more of the Dalit in India. From the 1920s and 1930s onwards, following an ongoing policy of appeal by activists for more rights for the lower castes, more Dalit were given access to schools. Demonstrations by the Dalit against the Indian National Congress continued; however, these did not prove particularly effective until Dr. Ambedkar took up leadership on behalf of Dalit rights, during the later decades of British rule (Kumar, 1999, pp. 58-59). Ambedkar was born in 1891 to a Dalit family of fourteen children in Indore, India (Chatterjee, 2004, p. 14). After acquiring two separate doctorates in Economics and Law from Columbia University (USA) and the London School of Economics (UK)

respectively, he went on to pursue the cause of Dalit rights. A Dalit himself, he used conferences, lectures, and meetings as forums to urge Dalit youths to seek education in order to improve their dignity and status within Indian society (Keer, 1971).

4.1 The Educational System in India: Pre- and Post-Independence (1920-1950)

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the British occupiers offered the Dalit some opportunities for political mobilisation. Chahal (2002) highlights the fact that, after 1920, British policy changed unexpectedly in support of the untouchables. The British colonisers had never previously paid attention to, or shown interest in, the suffering of the Dalit. Thereafter, however, the British government supported the Dalit cause by refusing to pass power into Indian hands until the Dalit had been provided with adequate protection in the form of constitutional rights. In 1919, the British implemented the Montague Chelmsford Reforms, which – at least theoretically – brought about “political equality for the Dalit community” in India for the first time (Chahal, 2002, pp. 62-63). However, Dr. Ambedkar believed that once India had attained independence, the Dalit would be subjected again to the authority of high-caste Hindus, and forced back into menial jobs and the position of servants. In order to safeguard their interests, therefore, he campaigned for the allotment of a number of “special parliamentary seats, in the form of ‘reservations’” for the Dalit (Michael, 2007, p. 34).

In the 1920s, the British government began a series of Round Table Conferences to offer political support and security to the minority communities then known as the ‘Depressed Classes’. About ten years later, when the second attempt was made to revise the Government of India Act of 1919 through another series of Round Table Conferences, Dr. Ambedkar submitted two statements, one to the Simon Commission in May 1928, and another in 1930 during the First Round Table Conference. His purpose was to incorporate into the Indian Constitution laws

upholding equal rights for the Dalit and promoting their access to the social, economic and political spheres of Indian society. In 1931, Dr. Ambedkar presented a memorandum seeking to amend the categorisation of the Depressed Classes, because the ‘untouchables’ objected to the term. The new attributions, ‘Scheduled Caste’ (SC) and ‘Scheduled Tribe’ (ST), were finally agreed upon in 1935 (Behura and Mohanty, 2006, p. 52).

The 1920s set in motion an increased “impetus to survey and examine the issues facing the Dalit” across the country (Kumar, 1999, p. 42). The findings eventually gave rise to the development of a ‘reservation’ policy (namely the Quota System) on behalf of the Dalit. Dr. Ambedkar declared that the state was responsible for developing and increasing the policies and programmes in place for the educational and economic development of Dalit communities. In 1924, he inaugurated the ‘Bahishkrit Hitkarini Sabha’, which aimed to promote the opening of libraries, social centres, hostels and classrooms for the educational advantage of young Dalit people. It later encompassed the building of “about thirty schools and universities” to promote Dalit literacy (Haslam, 1999, p. 106).

In 1928, Dr. Ambedkar established the Depressed Classes Education Society to organise school and higher education for the Dalit community of which he was himself a member (Keer, 1971). During the 1930s, he helped the Dalit to construct a unique political role and status, adopting the slogan “Educate! Agitate! Organise!” (Haslam, 1999, p. 108) to advocate “self-help, self-elevation and self-respect” on behalf of the cause (Keer, 1971, p. 41). Neera (1996) describes Dr. Ambedkar’s belief that education was the most important requirement for Dalit progress; that the surest means of achieving “their salvation lay in higher education” (p. 153).

4.2 Caste and Education: Dr. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi

Despite political movements seeking to secure equality for members of the Dalit caste, the practice of untouchability continued to flourish during Gandhi's era. This compelled Dr. Ambedkar to initiate the Dalit Conscious Movement in 1927 (Neera, 1996). As a democrat, he was dedicated to the struggle for the secular political rights of the lower castes, believing strongly that their difficulties would never be resolved without separate political representation. However, Gandhi was entirely opposed to the solution planned and proposed by Dr. Ambedkar (Omvedt, 1994). Gandhi used the term 'Harijans' ('people of God') to refer to the Dalit, and maintained that it was possible to eliminate untouchability and its associated discriminatory practices simply by influencing the hearts of upper-caste Hindus (Panandikar, 1997). However, Dr. Ambedkar disapproved of Gandhi's approach to the lower castes, which he dubbed "elitist". To him, Gandhi's views seemed to "justify the caste inequalities" (Hooda, 2001, p. 56; Omvedt, 1994).

Dr. Ambedkar believed that Gandhi, as a non-Dalit, had not sufficiently recognised the discrimination faced by the Dalit from India's upper castes. Moreover, Gandhi was absolutely against political representation for the Dalit (Chahal, 2002). Whereas Dr. Ambedkar continually challenged the caste system with the goal of shaping a more just and equitable society, Gandhi's concern was to maintain a stable, traditional social status quo. While Gandhi "denied the existence of untouchability", it was Dr. Ambedkar's central interest (Chahal, 2001, p. 67).

In the dispute between Gandhi and Dr. Ambedkar, the problem of Dalit untouchability received ever greater emphasis as an issue of social and political concern (Omvedt, 1994). Dr. Ambedkar was painfully aware of the discrimination and subjugation faced by the Dalit as a minority group, whereas Gandhi refused to consider them a minority group at all; his 'solution' to the dispute was to threaten to fast until death (Das, 1996). Dr. Ambedkar was compelled to save Gandhi's life,

and agreement was finally reached in 1932, when the two leaders “agreed upon the need to maintain a united front on behalf of Dalit” liberation, working against society’s caste injustices (Das, 1996, p. 241). Following this agreement, the struggle for the abolition of caste discrimination and the improvement of the Dalit situation became part of the national movement. Following India’s independence from British rule, provision was made in the country’s new Constitution for “statutory privileges [which] aimed to benefit and uplift the Dalit” (Hooda, 2001, p. 164).

In 1945, Dr. Ambedkar established the People’s Educational Society in order to ensure that education would be provided to further the political, social and economic development of the Dalit population. Additional improvements came in 1947, during the framing of India’s Constitution, when closer links were forged between educational access and the future of Dalit communities. The Constitution came into force between 1950-1952, along with the Quota System policy (as discussed in Chapter 2), which was included by the Chairman of the *Drafting Committee*: Dr. Ambedkar himself. The Quota System was considered a crucial part of “secur[ing] Dalit educational attainment” (Chitnis, 1997, p. 99). Those responsible for the policy included British officials, missionary activists, and reformers within local Dalit communities, such as Jotirao and Dr. Ambedkar.

4.3 The Post-British Educational System in India (1950 – present)

For the most part, educational institutions in India have historically been organised in line with the British model of education (Behura and Mohanty, 2006). The British system promoted an atmosphere of equality of rights based on individuality and not caste affiliation. However, this initial positive approach was not fully developed, and, moreover, was ineffectively implemented by the British government (Prabhakar, 1995). Nambissan (2002) observes that official reports

were filled with accounts of the “atrocities and discriminatory acts” committed against Dalit students in non-Dalit rural schools and colleges (p. 82).

The British colonial government realised that measures needed to be taken to improve the educational condition of the Dalit community (Verma, 2005). Proposals for the establishment of schools and colleges for Dalit to gain a Western education in English were eventually accepted. These institutions, motivated by the Western values of universalism, egalitarianism, freedom and democracy, increased Dalit literacy (Nambissan, 2002). However, while Western education shaped noteworthy personalities such as Gandhi, Jotirao and Dr. Ambedkar, it also brought about “another separation of high and low castes” (Panini, 1996, p. 48). Organisationally, a number of policies were modified and proposed by the British administration to establish separate educational institutions for the Dalit, in order to limit their contact with upper-caste children (Nambissan, 2002).

The State of Bombay’s Report on Education in the late 1940s and early 1950s noted that the separate schools provided for the Dalit were poorly run and funded, with generally only one teacher per school. The same review also reported that several upper-caste orthodox teachers had declined to teach Dalit students, and preferred to “grade and comment on their work from a distance” (Nambissan, 2002, p. 86). The British response was hesitant; officials were reluctant to take action. Although discriminatory practices had been banned in schools by the government, “no appropriate action” was taken against high-caste Hindus who committed acts of discrimination (Nirula, 2005, p. 68).

Yadav and Singh (1994) claim that the British administration agreed to hand over bureaucratic control to the “higher caste and professional elite” (p. 48), as their educational qualifications and literacy skills (to which the higher castes had ample access) made them better able to take advantage of the possibilities presented by both British rule and, later, India’s independence. The outcome was that “higher

castes occupied and controlled a large proportion of clerical and professional ranks” at all levels of the British administration (p. 157). Inevitably, high caste non-Dalits also came to secure bureaucratic control in educational institutions, whereas Dalits were never permitted the responsibility for running schools and universities (Hooda, 2001).

5. Synopsis: the Dalit and the Indian Educational System Today

After India gained independence from the British, its government took over the responsibility for providing education (see attached Appendix L) in different types of schools (missionary schools, elite grammar schools, village schools, segregated/mixed schools, etc.), in English and various regional languages, across all of the Indian states. However, the issue of caste monopoly continued to loom large in many educational institutions (Pais, 2007) – a problem which continues to be felt.

At present, the influence of caste on modern, secular educational institutions is still evident. Upper castes “control and manage the educational system at both the administrative and political level”, from its apex to its nadir (Gnanaraj & Krishnamurthy, 2000, p. 61; Pais, 2007). Dominating the upper echelon of educational management, they produce and manage policies that discriminate against lower castes and impede Dalits’ access to, and progression within, learning institutions (Gnanaraj & Krishnamurthy, 2000; Chalam, 2007). Although secular education has been considered the most significant change formally implemented by the British colonial government on behalf of all Indian people, the upper (non-Dalit) castes have unjustly “claimed traditional, religious and economic sanction for their control of the modern educational system”, and have continued to dominate its administration on these grounds (Puri, 2004, p. 88). Generally speaking, for example, a school head-teacher or administrator of upper-caste descent has the

power and authority to decide school rules and regulations, as well as to control the process of student admission (Verma and Singh, 2005). Caste hierarchy affects not only the selection of teachers and students and the appointment of managing committees, but, crucially, the processes involved in teaching and learning *per se* (DeLiege, 1997). The influence of caste operates in such a way that hierarchy is preserved and its interests served (Michael, 2007). For example, learning institutions administered and managed by Brahmins (high-caste non-Dalits) tend to recruit other non-Dalits – individuals from the dominant Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya castes – to management positions, while relegating Shudra and Dalit applicants (lower- and lowest caste, respectively) to menial positions serving the upper castes (Jogdand, 2007). This works further to preserve and maintain the hierarchical caste order.

Compared to the general Indian population, the average level of education attained by Dalits is extremely low (Rao, 2007). Rao (2007) argues that the poor socio-economic conditions experienced by the Dalit, as well as discriminatory practices in learning institutions, are largely responsible for their limited educational progress. According to Chalam (2007), however, the control by higher castes of India's educational structure is chiefly responsible for the “under-development of the Dalit” in educational terms (p, 82).

High-caste individuals still lay claim to privileged access to universities on the grounds of caste hierarchy, and continue to regard the Dalit as caste-less and ineducable (Sharma, 1994, p. 60). Nirula (2005) believes that, in the opinion of many non-Dalits, the Dalit are “educationally incompetent, and if educated, pose a threat to caste hierarchies and power relations” (p. 139). As a result, the rate of educational improvement among the Dalit caste has remained slow (Jogdand, 2007).

The educational system is controlled by the upper castes, and Louis (2003) claims that the upper caste “privately do not render support” for the Dalit caste, and fail “even conceptually” to agree with their educational aspirations (p. 60). Upper-caste teachers evince less interest in the learning of Dalit students than that of their non-Dalit peers (Pais, 2007). Unfortunately, many upper-caste teachers tend also to keep quiet about the caste discrimination practised against Dalit students (Aikara, 1980; Kundal, 2005). Lakshmi *et al.* (1999) claim that teachers “discriminate against even the most brilliant Dalit students due to caste affiliation” (p. 154). Many schools refuse admittance to Dalit applicants altogether. And even when Dalit students are able to gain access to schools, precautions are taken by non-Dalit students to ensure minimal physical proximity to them. Acts of caste discrimination from upper-caste teachers, educators, and students are often harsh and hateful (Massey, 1995). In September 1997, for example, the Indian Social Institute in New Delhi reported that “38% of Dalit boys and 30% of Dalit girls in rural areas did not attend schools due to fear of discrimination from non-Dalit” (Haslam, 1997, p. 39). This is one reason for the high drop-out rates among Dalit students, who find the educational environment far from congenial (Reddy *et al.*, 2004).

In short, the educational system of India is inseparable from the caste hierarchy that structures society. And the very same upper-caste individuals who perpetuate caste prejudice and exclude the Dalit are also “responsible for managing and administering India’s colleges and universities” (Reddy *et al.*, 2004, p. 109). Indeed, higher educational institutions have “widely ignored” the Quota System’s mandate to reserve 15% of seats (8% for Scheduled Castes and 7% for Scheduled Tribes) for Dalit applicants (Reddy *et al.*, 2004, p. 120). This issue will be examined in more detail in Chapter 2.

7. Conclusion

The Dalits have been subject to innumerable atrocities for a significant portion of India's history. They remain subject to discrimination at many levels within contemporary Indian society. Although measures were taken by Dr. Ambedkar to improve Dalit access to education, considerably less effort has been made by subsequent governments to promote their inclusion and development (see Timeline for Dalit affirmative action/activism and Dalit educational rights on pg. 36 and 37). A lack of educational attainment is an ongoing challenge to the improvement and advancement of Dalit communities. Institutions of learning remain under the influence of caste-based ideologies used to sanction discrimination by upper-caste authorities. Marginalisation and segregation are dominant themes in the lives of Dalit individuals. The extent to which these challenges persist will be examined in the following chapters, as we seek to explore and understand the impact of the Quota System policy on Dalit higher educational access and development.

A. Timeline on the legislative framework for affirmative action in education in the context of economic and political changes including the rise of Dalit activism and the formation of the Dalit Institute.

1) In 1924, Dr. Ambedkar established and inaugurated the “Bahiskrit Hitkarini Sabha”. This was aimed at opening libraries, social centres, hostels and classrooms for young Dalit educational opportunities (Haslam, 1999, p. 106).

2) Between 1950 and 1952, the Quota System (reservation system) policy was incepted and drafted into the Indian Constitution by Dr. Ambedkar, who was chairman of the Drafting Committee, in order to improve the well-being of the under-represented ‘Dalit’ peoples.

3) In the late 1980s state of Maharashtra many educated Dalit voiced their demands for equality of rights and access into the socio-economic-political sphere of Indian society. Political parties such as Bhim Sena, Dalit Sena, Dalit Sahitya Movement (DSM), Bhartiya Republican Party (BRP), were motivated toward politically representing Dalit social rights. Political and social organisations like the Dalit Panther, Dalit Liberation Army, Youth Republican, Dalit Sangharsh Samiti, along with Dalit theatre, Dalit Art, Dalit literature and, among Christians, Dalit theology, were set up as pressure groups for the education of Dalit (Burra, 1996; Michael, 2007, p. 35).

4) In the mid 1990s the Janata Dal (secular) political party acknowledged everyone’s rights to education and allocated government funds for the development of Dalit education at all levels (Kumar, 2004, p. 289).

5) The late 1990s saw increasing organization among Dalit activists. In 1997, the international NGO Human Rights Watch (HRW) became the first major human rights organization to engage in the issue of caste discrimination against Dalits in India. This led to the formation of the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR).

6) The Indian Institute of Dalit Studies (IIDS) was established in 2003 as a non-profit autonomous institute to undertake research and promote informed debate on the issues of social exclusion, discrimination, their consequences, policies against social exclusion and collective actions by civil society organisations and others, and inclusive policies.

B. International Conventions on Dalit Equal Education Rights

1) Dalit access into socio-economic-political spheres continues to be a daunting task for the Indian government. The Dalit issue has become an international concern, the 'First World Convention' being held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in October 1998. The Convention urged the UN to appoint 'special rapporteurs' to begin an investigation into this human rights violation and then take appropriate measures to implement policy to protect Dalit fundamental human rights, especially in the area of higher education (Chatterjee, 2004, p. 173).

2) Following the first convention, the 'International Conference on Dalit Human Rights', London, 2000 was organised by the 'Voice of Dalit' organisation. Their objective was to petition the international community to intercede to stop human rights violations faced by Dalit in India.

3) Formed in 2000, the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) facilitates coordination and information sharing among foreign organizations advocating for Dalit rights.

4) The 2001 UN World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (WCAR) in Durban presented perhaps the most significant breakthrough for the Dalit movement in terms of human rights issues.

5) The third 'International Dalit Conference' took place in 2003 in Vancouver, Canada. Apart from demands on equal opportunity and gender justice, the impetus in 2003 was toward influencing international funding agencies to exercise pressure on the Indian government to defend interests of Dalit especially within the realm of higher education in Indian universities (Chatterjee, 2004, pp. 173-179).

6) Dalit activism has made considerable strides in the last fifteen years. Major gains have been made by way of international recognition, especially at the level of the United Nations. Recent domestic successes have included a constitutional amendment extending reservations to private schools, colleges, and training institutions.

Chapter 2

A Critical Exploration of the Quota System Policy and Related Social Justice Issues

Introduction

Almost sixty years ago, in response to the many educational inequalities associated with caste bias, the Indian government finally established the Quota (reservation) System, with the aim of promoting Dalit access to universities. Part of the formal Constitution of India, the Quota System mandates the reservation of 15% of all university places for Dalit (8% for the Scheduled Castes, and 7% for the Scheduled Tribes) (Nirula, 2005). However, despite the Quota System's constitutional guarantee, government leaders in the post-independence period have paid little or no attention to the impediments that continue to hinder Dalits' access to, and progress within, higher education (Thorat, 2007). Existing research suggests that the operation of the Quota System policy has failings which both restrict the Dalits' access to higher education and impede their progression within the university setting (Chalam, 2007; Michael, 2007).

In order to describe and explain the range of practices of caste discrimination that limit the implementation of the Quota System policies, this chapter will review and evaluate research that addresses the issues encountered by the Dalit in gaining access to university places, both as students and as faculty. The first three sections are as follows: 1) the initiation of constitutional policies; 2) the Quota System and its legal position; and 3) the Quota policy initiatives for Dalits. In each case, the

operation of the relevant policies will be explained, and their effect on the Dalits in higher education analysed. The fourth section considers the various dimensions of social justice in order to achieve a holistic view of the manifold social injustices practised against the Dalit community. The fifth section of the chapter highlights various arguments relating to merit in the context of Indian higher education, and discusses the outbreaks of violence that have arisen over contested notions of merit with respect to the Quota policy. The sixth section describes the additional complexities of applying the Quota System policies in light of the emerging Dalit middle class, the so-called ‘creamy layer’ (Yagati, 2007). The seventh section delineates the discriminatory practices encountered by the Dalit today. The eighth section examines Dalit participation in higher education (as both students and faculty members) in statistical terms, with a particular focus on opposition to the Quota System, and considers how these forms of dissent still limit Dalit admissions to university education. The final section of the chapter summarises the challenges that the Dalit continue to face, and highlights gaps within the implementation of Quota System policies that restrict Dalit access to, and progress within, the higher education environment in India.

2. Initiation of Constitutional Policies for the Dalit

The Quota System, designed to reserve places for Dalit in higher education, was drafted into the Constitution of India between 1950-52. It sought to promote educational development for all Dalits in post-independence India (Srinivas, 2008). The system was introduced to counter the dominance of upper-caste Hindus who held the majority of posts in government administration and university management, and thereby reduced the active participation of the Dalit in higher education. In addition, while upper- and middle-caste Hindus were able to access reputable grammar schools, the Dalit were rarely if ever admitted into ‘good’ schools; they were educated instead in lower-quality educational settings, with

fewer teachers – sometimes no teachers – and limited learning resources (Srinivas, 1996; Das & Bhagawan, 2000). Upper-caste Hindus were dominant in the educational facilities provided by the British, as well as those offered by the Christian missionaries.

Efforts to expand educational provision for the Dalit on a national scale were eventually realised in 1950, when Dr. Ambedkar (a Dalit, and then Chairman of the Drafting Committee for the Constitution of India) introduced Articles 15, 29, 30, 45 and 46 into the Constitution. These measures were intended to secure equity for Dalit citizens. The laws were enacted and implemented at the level of both central and state government, in line with the framework set out in the Constitution of India for the social and educational advancement of the Dalit communities. Even today, the protective clauses in the Constitution of India form the legal basis of reserved access for the Dalit; in other words, their social upliftment. The Constitution mandates that university and college places are reserved for the Dalit – both the Scheduled Castes (SC) and the Scheduled Tribes (ST) – with Articles 15, 15(4), 46 and 346 reiterating constitutionally approved rights for these communities (Seceda, 1988; Shah, 1997; Charsley & Karanth, 1998).

The Indian Constitution makes provision for the education of all Indian citizens under Articles 29, 30, 45, and 46. Furthermore, Article 15 asserts that the state shall not discriminate against any citizen on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth. Article 15(4) empowers state governments to reserve 15% of university places for the Dalit (8% for the Scheduled Castes and 7% for the Scheduled Tribes), not only on general arts and science courses, but also in the more prestigious medical and engineering institutions (Bhagawan, 2000). In addition, Article 346 of the Constitution of India provides for the appointment of a Commission to “investigate and identify the disadvantages faced by the Dalit, and to recommend measures for their social and educational advancement” (cited in Srinivas, 2004, p. 16). These articles were incorporated into the Constitution’s

Directive Principles of State Policy as a foundation for the further upliftment of the Dalit by means of the Quota System.

2.1 Quota System - Legal Position

The Quota System is a form of affirmative action categorised under fair access measures in the Indian Constitution. The policy is enshrined in a series of legislative measures, programmes and schemes designed to benefit the weaker sections of Indian society. Since its inception in the 1950s, the Quota System has been administered by both central and state governments (Thorat & Negi, 2005; Chalam, 2007). The Quota policies derive their legal status and legitimacy from the Indian Constitution, and – at least in theory – seek to shield the Dalit from all forms of social injustice and exploitation through a series of legislative and executive measures for human rights protection. The Quota policies advocate the participation and promotion of Dalit individuals in institutions of higher learning, according to proportions outlined in the Constitution (Sheth, 2004).

Under the Quota arrangements, places are also reserved in hostels attached to India's central universities and colleges, and a proportion of scholarships are set aside for Dalit recipients by the government's educational funding system. Various states make special provision for Dalit students by providing financial aid, scholarships, designated hostels, fee concessions and/or grants for books. Dalit students across the whole of India are eligible for scholarships awarded by the National Talent Search Scheme (Mohanty, 2003; Behura & Mohanty, 2006). The universities and colleges administered by the central government are required to reserve 15% of their admissions and teaching posts for Dalit individuals (8% for members of the Scheduled Castes, and 7% for those of the Scheduled Tribes). India's University Grants Commission (UGC) also reserves lectureship positions and Master's-level places for applicants from the Dalit community (Beteille, 2008).

In theory at least, therefore, some efforts have been made to promote the educational development of the most excluded community in India – the Dalit.

2.2 Quota System Policy Initiatives for Dalits in Higher Education

This section will discuss the Quota policy initiatives designed by the government of India to support and promote the Dalits' educational advancement, as well as the challenges and tensions that have arisen from the government's failure to monitor the system adequately.

Since the implementation of the Quota System, one of the major objectives of higher educational policy in India has been to create a greater equality of educational opportunities for different castes and social groups.

The central focus in the educational development of the Dalit must be their right of equality with the non-Dalit population, within all stages and levels of education in India. (Nambissan, 2002, p. 116)

In its resolution on March 15, 1950, the Indian government set up a planning commission with the intention of utilising the country's resources to pursue social justice for the Dalit, based on Articles 39(a), (b) and (c) of the Constitution (Mohanty, 2003, p. 96). Specific Quota policy initiatives were planned to improve Dalit access to university education.

For example, the Community Development and National Extension Services Programmes introduced a series of seven Five-Year Plans (FYPs): 1951-56, 1956-61, 1961-66, 1969-74, 1974-79, 1980-85, and 1985-90. These plans were targeted primarily towards increasing the participation of the Dalit in higher education. They placed a particular emphasis on enhancing Dalits' access to universities, and

ensuring their successful completion of higher educational courses. India's state governments developed new educational approaches and programmes, providing scholarships, subsidised tuition fees, free examinations, and educational resources for Dalit students. Funding was set aside for post-metric and post-secondary (that is, eleventh- and twelfth-standard) courses for Dalit students, not only in the fields of arts, science and commerce, but also for professional and technical degrees in university settings. In practice, however, despite the directives of the FYPs, few of the initiatives to promote Dalit access were implemented by the National Extension Services Programmes, due to a general failure to monitor the government's Quota scheme (Government of India, 1952-1992).

Although these early initiatives to support the Dalits' educational access were proposed by the Community Development and National Extension Services Programmes, it was in fact the Mandal Commission Report, introduced by India's former Prime Minister V. P. Singh in 1990-91, that brought about a greater transparency in policy making and helped to enforce some of the policy directives on behalf of the Dalit. The Mandal Commission's primary aim was to enforce "principles of equity and social justice" for the Dalit community (Mathur, 2004, p. 53). In order to maintain transparency, the Commission took "special care to tap a number of independent sources for the collection of primary data" (Nirula, 2009, p. 98). Nirula (2009) reports that the important measures taken in this connection included the collection of evidence from "legislators, sociologists, etc.", along with the "preparation of reports [...] by specialised agencies" and "analysis of the census data" (p. 98). In adopting this multilateral approach, argues Nirula (2009), the Mandal Commission "prepared a very firm and dependable database for its report" (Nirula, 2009, p. 98). With the support of the influential ex-Prime Minister, significant hurdles were overcome and measures for monitoring Dalit access to higher education put in place.

While the efforts made during the 1990s to monitor the Quota policies were largely successful, the initiative was not continued after this period (Das, 2000). The implementation of the 1990-1991 Mandal Commission was never effectively monitored by the government, and the management of India's higher educational institutions lacked transparency (Mathur, 2004). Both government-owned and private universities were required by law to reserve seats for the Dalit. However, it was difficult to determine whether or not this obligation was being fulfilled at both a state and a national level, as required by the Mandal Commission (Nambissan, 2002; Thorat & Negi, 2005). Mathur (2004) believes that "at the empirical level, the Mandal Commission failed to provide requisite information in support of its recommendations" for policies to support the Dalit (p. 55).

Presently, there are no measures in place to ensure that Dalit are granted their constitutional right of admission to universities, or to determine whether or not they occupy the seats that are reserved for them, either state-wide or nationally (Singh, 2004; Brown & Sitapati, 2008). Government agencies still lack effective measures for auditing the educational policies implemented according to the Quota System. In spite of the growing visibility of the Dalit in various educational and professional fields, Deshpande and Yadav (2008) argue that, overall, they have made little progress in comparison to their non-Dalit counterparts. While many more Dalit are now eligible to fill the Quota seats, these seats may nonetheless remain empty, as local state authorities frequently find ways to sidestep the instructions of the central government (Brown & Sitapati, 2008). For example, the places reserved for Dalit applicants in national-level institutions (approximately 15%), "have never been fully filled by the Dalit", particularly in the high-status departments of medicine and engineering (Shah, 2002, p. 20). Jogdand (2007) believes that members of college management play "various tricks" in order to avoid filling the reserved seats (p. 318). If the seats are not taken by Dalit applicants, they can be offered to other (higher-caste) applicants. Jogdand undertook research in seventy colleges in northern regions of India (mainly comprising small towns), to find that some

government and private institutions had “intentionally deviated” from applying the Quota policy. Since the 1990s, according to Jogdand (2007), the number of academic places taken up by the Dalit has decreased as a result of such behaviour, despite the 15% quota allotted by the government for the Dalit community.

Tensions exist between the affirmative logic of the Quota System policy and human rights imperatives. For instance, Ghosh (2005) defends the Quota System as ethically necessary to compensate for the centuries of injustice suffered by a large section of the Indian population (the Dalit) due to their caste and social status. On the other hand, the system has met with disapproval for following the logic of “robbing Peter to pay Paul” (Ghosh, 2005, p. 163). In other words, if a non-Dalit student is denied admittance to a university due to reservations made for the Dalit, the non-Dalit applicant may view this as an affront to his or her own rights. Consequently, the Quota System generates tensions between non-Dalit and Dalit, which Ghosh (2005) believes “impede inter-caste relations” (p. 163). In addition, members of higher castes have argued that the Quota System continues to benefit well-off (creamy-layer) Dalit whilst failing to accomplish its true purpose of supporting the most disadvantaged members of the Dalit caste (Hooda, 2001).

The Quota System policy has been responsible for putting in place inclusive policies to promote Dalit access to universities, in response to the long-standing injustices and exclusionary practices inflicted upon members of the Dalit caste (Hooda, 2001; Jogdand, 2007; Thorat, 2008). However, the administration of Quota reservations confirms that, although the policies may in theory be empowering, the process itself is certainly not. While Quota reservations offer opportunities to Dalit individuals, the procedures associated with the system are notably insecure, often leading to Dalits’ exclusion from “the learning opportunities, cultures and communities of the mainstream society”, and thereby perpetuating their lack of social justice (Booth, 2003, p. 2).

Guru (2002) opines that, in philosophical terms, (social) justice for the Dalits has since ancient times been predicated on the following principles:

Preference for hierarchy over equality [and] the importance of respecting traditional rights and performing traditional duties. The concept of [social] justice contained no notion of equal treatment to all. In other words, the function of [social] justice in this kind of a society was to preserve the existing caste hierarchy rather than provide a criterion for social reforms. This concept had been used at the ideological level by upper castes [non-Dalits] and classes to deny the deprived sections [the Dalits] the essence of [social] justice. (p. 41)

As discussed in Chapter 1, Guru (2002) claims that “the established order [in Indian society] was based on graded inequality and was legitimized by Hindu law which completely negated equality [...] and human rights” (p. 41). Quoting Ambedkar, Guru (2002) states that “[t]he influence of the Hindu caste pervades India at an administrative level, with authority in all of its branches, [...] their principle is not equal justice to all [...] their motto is [social] justice consistent with established order [i.e. the hierarchical order of the caste system]” (p. 44, citing Ambedkar, WSBRA, 1984). In short, this has traditionally involved privileging the needs of non-Dalits over and above those of the Dalit caste community in every sphere of Indian society: educational, social, economic and political (Jogdand, 2007).

Pinto (2002) believes that the “dominant [non-Dalit] caste groups have acted as factors in obstructing educational mobility among the Dalits” (p. 187). Furthermore, he claims that there is a “definite design to keep the [Dalits] excluded, [while] at the same time mouthing slogans of social justice” (Pinto, 2002, p. 187). The Quota reservation policy was initially conceived to allocate seats for Dalits in higher studies at Indian universities; since its inception, however, high-caste non-Dalits have repeatedly taken steps to impede Dalit applicants from entering higher

education in India. It is imperative, therefore, to acknowledge that injustice continues to exist, as amply recognised by those upon whom it is inflicted: the Dalits (Rizvi, 2009). One must ask whether the learning process and social life at university are as smooth for Dalit students – even those who do manage to access higher education – as for their non-Dalit peers. What forms of inclusion and exclusion are experienced by the Dalit student and faculty communities? The issue of the Dalits’ exclusion raises social justice concerns which will be analysed in more detail in the following section of this chapter.

2.3 Quota Policy and Social Justice

Although India’s constitutional Quota System policy is designed to enhance educational access and development for the Dalit, the fairness principle at the heart of the policy has, in practice, become somewhat limited (Chitkara, 2002). The social injustice faced by the Dalit as a result of their caste affiliation needs to be acknowledged as a major problem, and one which still exerts considerable influence within Indian society. Chitkara (2002) observes that there is an “urgent and important” need for social justice for the Dalits: a kind of justice which “must be understood in a comprehensive sense” (p. 22). For this reason, it is vital to address the meaning and significance of social justice for the Dalit in higher education as one dimension of this ‘comprehensive’ approach.

In order to identify and analyse the injustices facing the Dalit in higher education, I will first provide a theoretical background for the exploration of social justice, and address the various meanings of social justice from a sociological perspective. Second, its various dimensions, namely distributive, cultural, and associational justice – drawing on Fraser (1997), Young (1990) and Gewirtz (1998) – will be explored in relation to the experiences of the Dalit community, with particular attention to India’s Quota System policy for higher education. While each of these

dimensions of social justice is undoubtedly significant, a specific focus will be taken on distributive justice, especially with respect to Dalits in higher education. In addition, issues relating to the ‘recognition-distribution’ dilemma will receive brief discussion in the context of the Quota policy measures for Dalit recruitment into university education.

2.3.1 Towards a Theory of Social Justice

According to Rawls (1999), social justice concerns the “distribution of the benefits and burdens of social cooperation”, and its principles provide a means of “assigning rights and duties in the basic institutions of society” (p. 4). Rizvi (2009) believes that forms of expression of social justice “vary across different cultural and national traditions” (p. 91). Furthermore, most constructions of social justice theory assume an egalitarian society based on the principles of equality and solidarity, which understands and “values human rights, and [...] recognises the dignity of every human being” (Zajda *et al.*, 2006, p. 1). However, the meanings attached to social justice may vary according to different perspectives and theoretical positions. Capeheart and Milovanovich (2007) point out that social justice is “necessarily broad, and inclusive of historical and critical examinations” (p. 1); and Bogotch and Schoorman (2010) claim that “any definition of social justice is an ongoing struggle” (p. 299). Drawing on Fraser (1997) and Young (1990), Gewirtz (1998) calls for a more complex theorisation of social justice in education, and highlights the significant limitations of distributive justice when assessed outside critical contexts. These limitations will be analysed and discussed in the subsequent sections of this chapter in relation to the Quota policy established on behalf of the Dalit, with particular reference to Dalits’ social identity.

2.3.2 Theoretical Dimensions of Social Justice in the Context of the Dalit Community

Capeheart and Milovanovich (2007) argue that the study of social justice requires scholars to develop “an understanding of distributive principles (fair allocation of rewards)” (p. 2). Social justice is frequently argued to fall within the distributive category of justice. Gewirtz (1998) explains distributive justice in terms of the “principles by which goods are distributed in society”, and regards it as often being “synonymous with social justice” (p. 470). Gewirtz (1998) underscores the relational characteristics of distributive justice, contending that this “relational dimension can be thought of as having a distributional component”. The two, she argues, are “strongly connected”, and their relationship “helps us to theorize about issues of power and how we treat each other [...] both on a macro and [...] a micro interpersonal level” (p. 471). Archer (2007) is also of the view that the relational dimension entails cultural recognition of and respect for difference as well as fair and just relationships. All of these elements need to be integrated in any attempts at socially just forms of distribution.

Miller (1999) believes that the distribution of resources must be of “central concern to any theory of (social) justice”, from “income and wealth” to “educational opportunities” (p. 11). In Rawls’ (1999) view, distributive justice entails “access to information” along with a “fair equality of opportunity in education”, “reasonably distributed” to satisfy the fundamental needs and rights of individuals within a society (p. 247). Wecker (2008) outlines a similar criterion for distributive justice: that “every individual receive a fair share of [...] rights and obligations” (p. 45). In some senses, therefore, the distributive dimension of justice is of use in shaping our understanding of social inequality, especially in the context of the Quota policy designed to promote Dalit access to higher education (Chitkara, 2002).

The government's official strategy – the Quota System policy – seeks to secure a form of distributive justice. The establishment of constitutional provisions more than fifty years ago was necessary to enable a more equitable distribution of opportunities for the Dalit through Quota reservations, and thereby to protect this vulnerable social group from social exclusion and economic exploitation. At the core of the strategy are the Indian government's efforts to minimise inequalities of income, status and opportunities, and to distribute resources for the Dalits' "social, economic and educational development" (Thorat, 2009, p. 9).

As an initiative taken by the Indian government, the Quota System policy could be considered affirmative in its efforts to "realise the goal of true equality among people" (Tomasson *et al.*, 2001, p. 11). The Quota policy authorises a percentage (15%) of seats to be set aside for Dalit university applicants (Tomasson *et al.*, 2001), which might well be regarded as a complex form of distributive justice initiated by the government and drafted into the Constitution of India (Hagemann *et al.*, 2008). However, while the Indian Constitution places official emphasis on justice and equality for all citizens in India, the unequal treatment of the Dalit in higher education (discussed further in Chapters 5 – 7) remains visible and marked, and continues to demand recognition. In this regard, there is a conspicuous disconnect between policy and practice.

In terms of the Dalits' social, cultural and political exclusion, it is also important to acknowledge that although distributive justice enables a few Dalits to gain access to universities such as Shah Jahan (see details of University of Shah Jahan in Chapter 4), they nonetheless continue to face disrespect from, and to be 'othered' by, their non-Dalit university colleagues (a situation discussed further in Chapters 5, 6 and 7). Along with the limits of distributive justice as represented by the Quota policy, it is also important to pay attention to the multiple dimensions of social justice in order to gain a fuller understanding of the various kinds of social injustice perpetrated against individuals of the Dalit caste.

Gewirtz and Cribb (2002) expand on the dimensions of social justice established by Fraser (1997) and Young (1990), who identify “three concerns of injustice: distributive, cultural and associational” (p. 502). Using Fraser’s (1997) terminology, Gewirtz and Cribb (2002) distinguish between “‘distributive’ injustice’, ‘cultural’ injustice, and ‘associational’ injustice” (p. 502), “with an understanding of social justice having all three facets” (p. 503). Within each of these systems of justice – distributive, cultural and associational – social and cultural forces in Indian society contribute to the manifold forms of oppression, marginalisation and exclusion experienced by the Dalit people.

Young (1990) describes cultural injustice as a form of “cultural imperialism”, whereby the “dominant group establishes the norm” (p. 74). The cultural injustice perpetuated by India’s caste hierarchy excludes the Dalit from various kinds of societal participation. Miller (1999) believes that such inequalities escalate when social justice policies or versions of such policies are “imposed by powerful individuals or classes of individuals” with the intention of “maintaining [forms of social control] that serve their interests” (p. 23). Chitkara (2002) considers the dominance of those from the highest Hindu caste (i.e. Brahmins) to be based on the principle of graded inequality, which means “elevation for some and degradation for others” (p. 24). According to this model, the Dalits face the brunt of prejudice as the ‘untouchable’ caste, especially due to the influence exerted by culturally dominant high-caste non-Dalits who exclude Dalits from partaking in socio-cultural, educational, economic and political activities (Chalam, 2007). The result is to exacerbate the marginalisation and segregation of the Dalit community (discussed further in Chapters 5 – 7).

One dimension of justice as explored by Gewirtz and Cribb (2002) is associational, involving “patterns of association amongst individuals and amongst groups which prevent some people from participating fully in decisions which affect the conditions within which they live and act” (p. 41). The Dalit are not represented in

the management structures of social groups; they are not consulted about their own futures; and they are dissuaded from participation in decision-making. With reference to the Dalit situation, non-Dalit exhibit indifference and/or exclusionary patterns of behaviour towards their Dalit colleagues; whether reducing their opportunities for development or carrying out more systematic methods of exclusion (Dhawan, 2005). Everyday practices of discrimination and exclusion undercut the official reform measures (i.e. the Quota policy) established for Dalits' educational advancement. Again, this is evidence of the chasm between policy and practice.

Although the Quota policy offers a minority of Dalits some access to higher learning, there has been a growing trend towards the exclusion and marginalisation of Dalit students, who may be excluded both physically and socially from daily activities at university, and who are at times prevented from participating meaningfully in the academic context (Sedwal & Kamat, 2008). That is, while the government provides the Dalit with the resources necessary to become part of the university learning environment, in their day-to-day academic lives Dalit students continue to be identified and treated as 'outcastes' (Jogdand, 2007). This kind of oppression and exclusion may usefully illustrate Fraser's (1997) redistribution-recognition dilemma.

Gewirtz (1998) outlines the concept of the recognition-distribution dilemma as follows:

in order for resources to be justly redistributed it is necessary for certain individuals and institutions to be identified – and therefore labelled – as in need of additional resourcing. But that process of identification and labelling may result in social marginalization and personal devaluation. This Fraser (1997) has called the redistribution-recognition dilemma. (p. 77)

The Quota System policy is acknowledged to assist a proportion of ‘needy’ Dalits in their access to higher education. However, the allocation of Quota seats is carried out by university management – composed overwhelmingly of non-Dalit individuals. When Dalit individuals access higher education by means of the Quota System’s policy of inclusion – that is, through the operation of distributional justice – they in theory take up a position equal to that of their non-Dalit colleagues (Jogdand, 2007). However, since redistributive justice inevitably “involves processes of categorization” (Gewirtz, 2006, p. 77), Dalit students are thereby identified as the lowest caste and can face prejudice as a result – despite being part of the elite university environment. This exemplifies Fraser’s (1997) dilemma.

Paradoxically, therefore, in its very promotion of the Dalits’ higher educational development, the Quota System policy may contribute to the inequality they face. In taking advantage of the Quota seats reserved in universities, Dalit students locate themselves within the caste hierarchy of Indian society, and thus continue to be categorised as ‘Dalits’ by their teachers and fellow students, which may exacerbate their marginalisation (Pais, 2007). One result is the recognition-distribution predicament, whereby Dalits form part of a privileged social group (in this case, the elite university environment), while at the same time being singled out as members of an unprivileged group (in this case, belonging to a lower caste).

2.3.3 Forms of Justice and the Dalit

The Constitution of India has put in place some protective measures and safeguards to ensure that a form of social justice remains available to some of the Dalit people (Paswan and Jaideva, 2003). Indeed, the pursuit of social justice and fairness is reflected in India’s legal statutes, which claim to seek the “betterment of the weaker sections of society, ensuring human rights to the lowliest” (Chitkara, 2002, p. 39). Article 39 (a) makes the following pledge:

The State shall secure that the operation of the legal system promotes justice, on the basis of equal opportunity, and shall, in particular, provide free legal aid, by suitable legislation or schemes or in any way, to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason of economic or other disabilities. (cited in Chitkara, 2002, p. 39)

In practice, however, the Dalit are the first to suffer in many areas of Indian society. Following Young, Gewirtz (1998) identifies five key types of oppression: “exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence” (pp. 469-470), all of which are experienced by the Dalit. The Hindu social structure is composed of manifold castes and communities, whose sheer variety “create[s] walls and barriers of segregation, and must be understood in a broader sense in relation to the issue of social justice” (Chitkara, 2002, p. 22).

Indian theorists such as Rizvi (2009) and Chitkara (2002) have related their views and criticisms of Indian social policy to theories of social justice, especially regarding the Quota policy and the predicament of the Dalits. For example, Rizvi (2009) acknowledges that the distributive model of social justice is, in principle at least, reflected in the Quota Policy in terms of the Dalit community (namely access to and participation in higher education). However, he argues that the distributive dimension of social justice is insufficient on its own, in the context of the civil liberties of the Dalit, because it fails to take account of the wider cultural context of Indian society. The concept of social justice is complex and multi-dimensional and seeing it solely in terms of redistribution does not fully explain it. Thus, critical aspects of justice become rendered invisible and are marginalised from practice. One dimension of social justice that Rizvi believes needs to be included is that of cultural recognition and respect. Rizvi (2009, pp. 93 – 94) argues that the current forms of recognition of Dalit identity and difference –cultural-traditional recognition – are oppressive and excluding. His point is that the excluding practices of caste that position the Dalit as ‘untouchable’, have resonated over the centuries

and are still in play in the contemporary setting in India. So, while a small number of Dalit may successfully gain access to higher education, they will simultaneously experience the ‘otherings’ and exclusions that shape the daily experiences of all Dalit.

The Indian Constitution positions social justice in a broad sense which accommodates social and economic justice to some extent. However, according to Rastogi (2011) what is meant by social justice is not made explicit anywhere in the Indian Constitution, despite equality being considered an ideal component and goal. Chitkara (2002) takes a different approach, arguing that while the necessity for social justice and equality is voiced in the Indian Constitution, the principle of “graded inequality” (p. 24) continues to exist within society in the form of a caste hierarchy dominated by high-caste Brahmins and underpinned by religious (Hindu) tenets. To some extent, this critical tension mirrors what Fraser (1995) called the distribution-recognition dilemma. In terms of recognition, Chitkara (2002) strongly claims that in India, some cultural norms are biased against showing respect for and recognition of the Dalit. Thus, the practices of social justice principles to the culture and society of India requires further scrutiny – especially in the case of the Dalit within the ideological and cultural context of Hinduism.

Amartya Sen (2009) highlights the importance of the “enhancement of global justice” (p. 26). His reliance on Indian conceptions of social justice and rationality informs his book, *The Idea of Justice*, which offers both a major expansion on and critique of Rawls’ *Theory of Justice*. Sen (2009) argues that while Rawls’ theory of justice is predicated upon an “extensive cluster of institutions that determines the basic structure of a fully just society”, it is essential that any theory of “social justice be able to determine the distributional inequalities present within other societies” (p. 26). Accordingly, Sen (2009) has explored the concept of justice on a global scale. However, his work attempts to respond to the wider problems and inequalities in the distribution of well-being and happiness in society (emotional

well-being as well as material resources). He argues for a global, cultural and religious understanding of larger and more diverse societies in which minorities continue to suffer insults to social justice and human rights – this includes the need for respect as well as fair treatment and equal rights. This approach might usefully be applied to the situation of the Dalit in Indian society, especially in the context of higher education. Similarly, Rizvi (2009) believes that the expression and practices of social justice “vary across different cultural and national traditions” (p. 91). In the context of Indian society, social justice varies unpredictably according to the time, situation, customs and objectives of different individuals within society – it is context and level dependent (Gewirtz, 2006; Rastogi, 2011). Both Sen (2009) and Rizvi (2009) see a need to place calls for social justice on a global footing. Their claims for the universalization of justice would also contribute at a national/local level once this argument was accepted and acted on at a supra-national level.

Traditional interpretations of social justice in education in India have attributed an important role to the state in bringing about greater “equality of access, opportunities, and outcomes” (Rizvi, 2009, p. 93). Certainly, scholarship awards have led to some positive outcomes for a small number of Dalit students in terms of accessing higher education. The Quota policy has benefited some individuals of the Dalit caste, reducing to some extent the “marginalization or exploitation” suffered by these individuals (Gewirtz, 2006, p. 74, quoting Fraser, 1997). However, discrimination and exclusion continue to undercut the reform measures established for Dalits’ educational advancement (Sedwal & Kamat, 2008). The result has been the continued oppression of Dalit students, which despite the Quota measures remains strikingly in evidence in Indian universities (see Chapters 5 – 8).

Although some scholars may claim or imply that the Dalit community is supported educationally by the Quota System, it is necessary to explore whether this is in fact the case – especially in a premier university environment, where the experiences of the Dalit have often been overlooked (Jafferelot, 2003). A Dalit individual may

enter a ‘good’ university by means of the Quota System, and one might argue that he/she has thereby been included, and given the opportunity to benefit from a good education. But the underlying issue is whether that individual is able to participate fully as a student (see Chapters 6 – 7 for further discussion) or as a faculty member (see Chapter 5) without encountering resentment or bias within the university environment. One must ask whether the learning process and university social life are as smooth for the Dalit student or faculty member as for his/her non-Dalit peers. Articles 16: 4(a) and 16: 4(b) of India’s Constitution stipulate that every eligible Dalit, “howsoever socially advanced, is constitutionally entitled to bid for quota benefits” (Deshpande, 2003, p. 185-186). The Indian Constitution renders discrimination against the Dalit community an offence punishable in a court of law. Universities across the Indian sub-continent are required to adhere to the law that disallows any form of discriminatory act against minorities – especially the Dalit. However, while these statutes are clearly laid out on paper, the system of caste hierarchy continues to prevail in practice; another example of the policy/implementation disconnect.

In terms of distributive justice, the Quota policy fails to fulfil several other requirements of social justice – as evidenced both by the extant literature and by the data set used in this study (analysed and discussed in Chapters 5 – 8). Although the interpretation of the Quota policy as a form of distributive social justice offers a useful initial approach for analysing the situation of the Dalit, it is complicated by the existence of the more economically advantaged ‘creamy-layer’ Dalit (for further discussion see Chapter 8). The distributive dimension of social justice as meted out by the Quota policy has tended to benefit one group within the Dalit community (the ‘creamy layer’) over the other (the poorer ‘Quota’ Dalits), who thus remain marginalised (as discussed in Chapter 8). It is vital, therefore, to note the difficulties involved in making claims that cover such a heterogeneous group. The inherent complexities of Dalit identity pose additional challenges to understanding the position of the Dalit caste within Indian society.

The social position of the Dalits is determined not only by their caste and gender, but by other factors such as level of education, socio-economic status, and class; whether ‘creamy layer’ or working class, for example. In short, context shapes positionality (Alcoff and Mendieta, 2003). Beyond the distinction made between ‘creamy layer’ and working class, the identity of the Dalit people is even more complex and varied, especially due to sub-caste differences (see discussion in Chapter 8). Their social group is also considerably differentiated: between urban and rural, for example, and educated and non-educated, rich and less rich.

The issue of oppression takes on an additional complexity when considered within the framework of the Dalit caste. Internal schisms and exclusionary practices have come increasingly to light in recent years. The Quota System policy designed to promote access to universities has instead generated problems such as sub-caste differences, which have in turn given rise to further unrest within the Dalit community (Rana, 2008). Individual responses to the Quota policy are proving a serious threat to Dalit society at large (Kumar, 2002; Rana 2008), and inbuilt prejudices are alienating Dalit individuals from each other (see discussion in Chapter 8).

Understanding the Quota measures as a form of distributional justice is problematised by the inequality between the affluent ‘creamy-layer’ Dalits and the poorer, under-privileged ‘Quota’ Dalits (see Chapter 8). Shah (2002) is of the view that the “existing constitutional provisions and legislative measures have helped them [the Dalits] achieve *some* socio-economic” and educational change (p. 388, my italics). Yet, some Dalits who belong to the ‘creamy-layer’ class are better able to take advantage of the Quota policy. Although the city-dwelling creamy layer are likely still to face covert discrimination, and may be stigmatised by non-Dalit of a higher caste, they are nonetheless more mobile and better placed to avoid the excesses of oppression. Moreover, creamy-layer Dalit seeking places in universities – and particularly in elite, high-status universities – are ideally positioned to benefit

from the advantages of high-status schooling and socio-economic privileges (see Chapter 8 for further discussion).

Although the distributive paradigm of social justice is concerned with the distribution of goods (such as Quota seats for Dalits in higher education), Rizvi (2009) highlights an important proviso. He argues that the paradigm is:

inadequate in fully accounting for [...] respect, recognition, rights, opportunities [...] because injustice can also be rooted in social patterns of representation [...] issues of identity, difference, cultural recognition and exploitation [...which] are highly relevant to the concerns of justice in education. (pp. 93-94)

In the case of the Dalits, the Quota reservations have created additional, pressing problems which have given rise to unrest within the Dalit community. These include concerns about ‘merit’ (Amman, 2007; discussed later in this chapter), and the division between creamy-layer and the Quota Dalits (Rana, 2008; discussed further in Chapter 8). The explicit objectives of the Quota System policy have been obscured and perhaps exploited by economically advantaged (‘creamy-layer’) Dalits, who have accessed university places on the grounds of their wealth and status. Such behaviour has adversely affected the educational aspirations of some deserving but poorer Dalit students (for further discussion see Chapter 8). As a result, some Quota Dalits may believe that the creamy-layer Dalits are unfairly privileged. Indeed, efforts to secure distributional, cultural and associational justice are made yet more complex by the greater mobility and better placement of the creamy-layer Dalit, who are, moreover, still able to take advantage of the Quota policy.

Issues of gender might further skew any understanding of the Quota System policy as a form of distributive justice. Dalit female students experience more

discrimination than their male counterparts (see Chapter 7). Caste governs gender norms, and is deeply bound up with the cultural norms and practices of Indian society. Compared to Dalit males, female Dalits often bear the brunt of bias relating to “caste, gender and class” (Paswan & Jaideva, 2002, p. 18). The identities of Quota and creamy-layer males and females (see Chapter 8) will be analysed closely in this section in terms of social justice. Although the females interviewed for this study are from privileged, well-off backgrounds, this is not the case for all Dalit females in India’s universities, many of whom come from poorer families. Moreover, although Dalit females form part of a privileged group within an elite university setting, as Dalit they continue to face marginalisation and segregation at the hands of their non-Dalit peers and teachers – both male and female (Levin, 2009). They are thus simultaneously included and excluded, in yet another illustration of the recognition-distribution dilemma. Inequalities of power and position intrude further upon the relationship between Dalit males and females. Dalit females occupy a relatively precarious position: they are more likely to face discrimination than their male counterparts, and possess considerably less power and influence. In general, males within India’s hierarchical society hold the reins of socio-economic and political control, positioning them over females in every aspect of social and educational life (see Chapter 7).

Dalit female students may theoretically form part of the university environment, insofar as they are studying for a degree; but their gender, caste and class place them in the role of ‘outsiders’. For example, a Dalit female may enter the portals of higher education by means of the Quota System, and one might argue that she is thereby included, and has gained the privileges of a good education. But the underlying issue is whether Dalit females are able to participate fully within the academic environment without encountering resentment or bias from their male colleagues – non-Dalit and Dalit alike (Rao and Latha, 2007). It is vital to determine whether university life is as smooth for Dalit female students as it is for their non-Dalit (male and female) and Dalit (male) counterparts. It is also essential

to investigate the ways in which inclusive and exclusionary practices operate on the basis of gender, both within and outside the Dalit community, in the context of higher education; and what, if any, strategies the Dalit employ to manage and/or resist these practices.

2.4 The Logic of Merit: Arguments ‘For’ and ‘Against’

The Quota policy has “invited a host of criticisms from the various sections of society” (Shah, 2002, p. 388). Many middle-class non-Dalits suspect that their own access to higher education has been reduced as a consequence of the Quota policy, and seek a system that would instead benefit non-Dalit applicants. Many non-Dalits consider the Quota policy to have eroded a merit-based admissions policy (Amman, 2008), hindering more deserving non-Dalit applicants in favour of less meritorious Dalit individuals (Hooda, 2001; Jogdand, 2007; Thorat, 2008).

In contrast, the Dalit argue in favour of the so-called protective discrimination administered by the government through the Quota policy, which is designed to offset the denial of education to discriminated groups (namely the Dalits) throughout the whole course of Indian history. Many Dalit thus believe that the Quota System is fair insofar as it compensates for centuries of inequality, discrimination and segregation (Kamble, 2002; Thorat *et al.*, 2005).

2.4.1 Meritocracy in Higher Education: Philosophical Rationale

In an Aristotelian sense, ‘proportional equality’ means that an individual is rewarded in proportion to the quality or talent that he or she possesses (Germino, 2000). Voegelin (1957) argues that this approach involves giving out “greater awards to those individuals who are distinguished by ‘high merit,’ and lesser

awards to those individuals less likely to achieve the standard of high merit” (cited by Germino, 2000, p. 302). Voegelin emphasises that the principle of proportional equality cannot be applied in a “political community without some qualifications because the strict application would arouse the resentment of the masses” (cited by Germino, 2000, p. 302). It follows that the allocation of university places to Dalit applicants of less merit is likely to provoke resentment among more meritorious non-Dalit individuals. In relation to the Quota reservation policies, the pursuit of proportional equality has raised some concerns among upper-caste non-Dalits (particularly Brahmins), who are to varying degrees hostile to what they consider an erosion of merit-based admissions (Amman, 2008). In summary, many non-Dalit regard the Quota policies as unfair on two counts. First, the system is believed to hinder meritorious applicants in favour of less deserving applicants. Second, non-Dalits argue that the Quota reservations prioritise mediocre candidates, thereby depriving the nation’s universities of its most intelligent minds (Hooda, 2001; Jogdand, 2007; Thorat, 2008).

Amman (2008) claims that a definition of “merit as achievement” motivates millions of students, because ‘merit’ has an ideological function in today’s India, facilitating entry to prestigious and powerful positions (p. 356). Amman (2008) believes that the notion of merit magnifies the qualities of those who are selected, rendering disparity normal and legitimising a selected few as the ‘rightful’ and ‘just’ occupiers of special positions (Amman, 2008, p. 359). According to the meritocratic ideal, merit and achievement are held at a premium (Amman, 2008). However, Beteille (2008) observes that if special opportunities are created for some, the “provision of equal opportunities for all is adversely affected” (p. 49). Beteille believes that the reservation of 15% of university places for Dalit applicants “threatens the principle of equal opportunities irrespective of caste, creed and community” which is also inscribed in the Constitution of India (p. 50). In contrast, Ghosh (2008) argues that a variety of ‘unofficial’ Quota System policies function in India through kinship relations, caste association and networks of

professional acquaintance (p. 106). Pinto (2008) supports Ghosh's view, adding that religious customs and traditions have also impeded the Dalits' access to mainstream education (p. 76). Pinto (2008) claims that in the Indian context, merit has become an "alibi" for preserving the "Brahminical – upper-caste – status quo", which restricts access to, and control over, knowledge and institutions to an elite minority (p. 77).

Pinto (2008) adds that there is no such thing as "pure merit", and that, in any case, merit cannot be measured in terms of marks obtained in an examination. In his view, merit includes certain "qualities of mind and the heart" that are essential for public and national service (p. 80). According to Pinto (2008), the so-called 'merit' of the upper castes and classes is a fiction by means of which the upper castes have for centuries oppressed the lower castes and excluded them from social opportunities (p. 81). He claims that the kind of merit respected by the upper castes, such as high marks in public examinations, has nothing to do "with rectitude, social concern, and feeling for others"; all of which, he believes, reflect a different construction of 'merit' (Pinto, 2008, p. 81).

Pinto (2008) argues that over the last sixty years, Indian society has suffered as a result of large-scale corruption, administrative inefficiency, and the generally poor performance of officials appointed on the basis of 'merit' (p. 82). Raju (2007) also claims that the meritocracy dispute raised by the non-Dalit community threatens the constitutional rights of the Dalit in an educational setting (p. 100). With reference to the contested issue of Quota seat reservations, Raju (2007) suggests that high-ranking non-Dalit within the management and administration of higher education may end up filling educational institutions with non-Dalit students who hold "anti-Dalit attitudes" – all on the basis of the meritocratic ideal, and the argument that these students have high-level entry qualifications (p. 101).

Objections to and concerns over the government's Quota policies in relation to merit have exacerbated discord within the Indian polity, leading to acts of sectarianism and communal violence against the Dalit community (Rao, 2007). In March 1981, for example, the Rane Commission approved an increase in the number of university places reserved for Dalit in the state of Gujarat from 31% to 49%. Such a high number of reservations was necessary due to the lack of educational support and development in the Gujarat region, which offered far less assistance than other region-states in India. Governmental support for this increase, which aimed to meet the growing needs of the Dalit community, led to an outbreak of violence against Dalit students: school buses were burnt; schools and colleges were pelted with stones; individual Dalit students were attacked; and demonstrations were held by anti-reservationist educators and students. Moreover, in the decade following the Rane Commission's approval of increased reservations, several "high-caste students from the University of Delhi immolated themselves" in protest, further aggravating the political situation (Rao, 2007, p. 157).

During the 1990s, violence against Dalit students accelerated and intensified in parallel with the attempts made to implement Quota System policies to increase Dalit access to universities and technical colleges (Chatterjee, 2004). The Indian Report on Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes describes an extreme case of caste bias in 2002, when a Dalit student was murdered by two Brahmin (high-caste) students in New Delhi. The latter had refused to tolerate studying Sanskrit with a lower-caste classmate (Nambissan, 2002, p. 106). According to data available from the National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB), the state of Uttar Pradesh accounted for 47.7% of the total recorded countrywide crimes against the Dalit in 1994. The corresponding figures for Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh were 14.2% and 11% respectively. The Dalit Forum (an online news source) reported that violence against the Dalit rose from 24,992 cases in 1992 to 33,908 in 1994, registering a substantial increase in Dalit hostility. In 2000, according to the Forum's most recent update, 31,171 atrocities were carried out against the Dalit. Evidently, there was no

appreciable decline in anti-Dalit violence between 1994 and 2000. Ghosh (2008) claims that, due to the Quota policy and the reservation of university seats for Dalits, violence against the Dalit has increased “immeasurably” (p. 93). This violence is one of the primary factors hindering the Dalit from gaining access to universities.

In 2001, Hooda reported that the Indian public remained divided on the issue of the Quota System. Anti-reservationists, including political bureaucrats, students and teachers, claimed that the Quota policy ignored individual merit in the name of social justice, resulting in injustice to “the meritorious”; they argued that the reservations were “increasing caste schisms, instead of uniting them” (Hooda, 2001, p. 16). Influential high-caste individuals continue to oppose the government’s Quota schemes on the basis of merit, arguing against the exclusion of ‘able’ high-caste students (Stein, 2010).

2.5 Opposition to the Quota System Policies

The relative effectiveness and success of the Quota policy have been challenged by the emergence of a small, privileged group within the Dalit caste, commonly known as the ‘creamy layer’. This group includes Dalit individuals whose fathers and/or mothers have already benefited from the Quota policies, and who lead more privileged lives in metropolitan environments (Yagati, 2007). These Dalit often come from a particular Jāti, or sub-caste, within a given region (Rana, 2008; also see Chapter 8). In the state of Uttar Pradesh, for example, the Jatavs take a leading role; in Maharashtra state, the Mahars are at the forefront. Arguably, this hierarchy of sub-castes within the Dalit community defeats the object of the Quota System, since it prevents other, less privileged Dalit sub-castes from attaining significant access to the reservations (Jaffrelot, 2007). It also makes the Quota System

especially difficult to monitor, and the disadvantages placed upon the much less privileged Dalit often go unrecognised.

Over the years, access to universities by means of the Quota System has enabled certain Dalit individuals and groups to gain some privileges, raising their status among other Dalit. These privileged sections of Dalit society, whose affluence has enabled them to benefit further from the reservations, enjoy state-sponsored mobility at the expense of others in their caste group (Hooda, 2001; discussed further in Chapter 8). In short, therefore, the recipients of the Quota reservations are likely to be economically well-off Dalit individuals rather than those from poorer sections of the community (Hooda, 2001). Scholarships for higher education are usually accessed by the children of rich Dalit in urban centres, rather than the children of economically deprived Dalit in rural towns, whose “families often subsist on minimal wages” (Singh & Malik, 2001, p. 217).

Other aspects of the Quota System, including the scholarship awards, grants, and free hostel accommodation for Dalit in colleges and universities, have caused further anxiety and apprehension among non-Dalit students. High-achieving non-Dalit students from low-income families may feel that their academic futures are challenged and undermined by the Quota System, which prioritises the admission of Dalit students who may be less academically deserving. Opponents of the government’s Quota policy scheme have regularly expressed their concerns to the Supreme Court. During the late 1990s and the early years of the twenty-first century, this issue was taken up by several high-caste political bureaucrats who opposed scholarship grants and free hostel accommodation for Dalit students, and sought political means (such as new state legislation) to limit these benefits in different Indian states (Srinivas, 2004). In sum, therefore, the government’s Quota System policies have always been controversial, and have received significant opposition since their inception.

2.6 Cultural Injustice

Discrimination is a defining feature of higher education in Indian society today. Deshpande (2008) claims that Dalit students are usually underestimated by Indian universities, and are often described “as inferior or less significant by educators and students alike”, the majority of whom are high-caste (p. 327). Even at the government level, discrimination persists. According to Prasad and Gaijan (2007), the implementation of new educational support programmes is often slowed in order to reduce any tangible benefit to the Dalit.

Dalit students in higher education, even those belonging to the ‘creamy layer’, often claim that they are made to feel worthless. They report facing discrimination from their non-Dalit peers, whose antipathy towards the reservation system can be so intense that Dalit students fear disclosing their identity (Kamble, 2002). For example, 51% of the 686 Dalit students interviewed in a survey undertaken at Milind College in Aurangabad described experiencing caste-related discriminatory treatment from classmates. They reported facing opposition whenever they sought to exercise their right to receive education on an equal footing with their non-Dalit classmates (Nambissan, 2002).

Vasavi (2008) cites reports by Dalit students of becoming embittered by perpetual discrimination: being ignored in classrooms, for instance, and mocked by both teachers and students (p. 60). Moreover, the issue of caste bias affects the application process. At the Indian Institute of Technology in Chennai, for example, Dalit students were given coloured application forms, while non-Dalit applicants were issued white forms. The coloured forms were easily distinguished – and thereby separated – from the white forms when students were selected during the admissions process (IIT, Chennai, 2006). Agnivesh (2007) suggests that colleges and institutions of high standing can show apathy and indifference to the

educational requirements of the Dalit. For example, Agnivesh (2007) notes that in the state of Andhra Pradesh, more than 9,000 engineering seats in various colleges remained vacant in the academic year of 2006, because there simply “weren’t enough non-Dalit to fill the seats” (p. 87). Although the chief aim of the Quota policy is to include the Dalit community, some universities deliberately withhold such opportunities from Dalit applicants (Rana, 2008).

The university places earmarked for the Dalit by the Quota System often fail to be taken up; this may be due in part to the alleged discrimination practised by some heads of departments in colleges and universities. According to the Chair of the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (the Dalit), discrimination is manifested in various ways: from the destruction of application forms to ad hoc recruitment from non-Dalit applicants on the grounds, falsely, that the Quota reservations are full (cited in Ghosh, 2008, p. 90). More often than not, selection interviews are held in English, thus favouring middle- and upper-class students from private elite schools and colleges in metropolitan regions, whose grammar-school education has included English teaching. Poorer Dalit candidates may face difficulties in gaining university admission due to a lack of fluency in English, as the majority hail from homes in which English is never spoken. In short, Dalit applicants for university scholarships face significant bias, with their applications often ignored by university and government officials (Das, 2000; Deshpande, 2008).

Faculty members are another potential source of discrimination; their own caste affiliation may lead them to discriminate against Dalit students who seek university places (Lakshmi *et al.*, 1999). Caste discrimination from university faculty members and upper-caste students is harsh and hateful (Das, 2000), and Dalit students are frequently made to feel inferior. Deshpande (2008) claims that non-Dalit students from higher-caste families with economic and educational privileges feel superior, and treat Dalit students in accordance with the caste values they have

internalised. Based on student testimonies, Srinivas (2008) claims that between “60% and 70% of high-caste” (non-Dalit) teachers exhibit some form of discrimination (p. 299). Yet another IIT (Indian Institute of Technology) student in Srinivas’ study recalled telling his teacher that he was unable to understand a question, and being asked in response if he were a reserved-caste student. Srinivas (2004) observes that high-caste Hindu teachers may be inclined to look down on Dalit students, and some may even consider them ineducable. According to Kundal (2005), teachers have been reported to testify that Dalit do not deserve university places because their presence “lower[s] standards of higher education” (p. 254).

One such example of discrimination is from Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in New Delhi, known for its support for the underprivileged. In 1994, one Dalit student applicant was given notably low grades in an admissions interview in spite of a distinction earned in his Master’s degree from the same university, and high scores for his written admissions test. Dr. Geeta of JNU commented at the time:

Within educational systems, Dalit students continue to experience social discrimination and this can be seen both in the official curriculum, in the approved content of education, and the hidden curriculum of schooling. Dalit communities rarely form part of school knowledge. Untouchability is rarely mentioned in school books or discussed in the classroom. The lowest castes continue to be discriminated against in schools as well as universities, and blatant practices particularly in the attitudes of teachers and university authorities as in peer behaviour continue. (cited in Sharma, 1994, pp. 63-64)

Mehta (2008) argues that most “pedagogical techniques” in Indian universities still fail to respond to the needs of different students (p. 365). Teachers often show a lack of flexibility in responding appropriately to the needs of Dalit students. While

Dalit students certainly encounter unfair treatment from their classmates, it is even more common for Dalit students to be left out of classroom experiences by their teachers.

Srinivas (2008) believes that the failure to follow the procedures required by the Quota System in terms of recruiting Dalit students, especially to high-status engineering, medical and other professional courses, is “common practice by higher-caste university administrators” (p. 302). Complaints made to the Commission by Dalit victims of discrimination have often proved ineffective; first, because the Commission’s follow-up of Dalit complaints is slow, and second, because the complainants are frequently discouraged from pursuing their grievances. Srinivas (2008) believes this to be the case due to the apathy of high-caste government bureaucrats and university administrators in matters concerning the Dalit.

Policies designed to reserve faculty positions in higher education institutions for Dalit applicants “may also generate caste conflict” (Sheth, 1997, p. 213). In one notable case, a Dalit scholar from a university was harassed in all possible ways. She was selected as Associate Professor of Mathematics in 1996, but deprived of her right to a monthly salary. Despite being a highly qualified mathematician, with more than 350 journal publications and conference papers, she faced ongoing discrimination from college management due to her unflinching support for the cause of Dalit education: she was vociferous in promoting the need to maintain a 15% reservation for Dalit students in technology colleges (Sheth, 1997). Zelliot’s (1996) study of the Mahars (a Dalit sub-caste) shows that Mahar academics who are prolific in their production of literary works and papers are often ignored, their articles frequently going unpublished (p. 71). In 2006, the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) in Chennai reported the presence of only two Dalit individuals within a total of 427 faculty members (IIT, Chennai, 2006).

Dalit family names form an important aspect of social identification, both within schools and in Indian society at large. A person's last name usually identifies his or her caste affiliation, based on which personal and professional relationships are subsequently established. Other signs used to identify caste are village address, body language and accent. If an individual bears a Dalit surname, he or she is likely to experience prejudice from non-Dalit students; this may occur in the form of bullying and derogatory name-calling. Such prejudice has led many Dalit to change their "full name or surname to avoid discrimination" (Nirula 2005, p. 132). Kamble (2002) offers an equivalent example from the academic setting, quoting one Dalit educator who described similar discrimination at the hands of non-Dalit peers. His experiences reflect the fact that Dalit academics face caste-based prejudice in both everyday social settings and their particular scholarly field. The Dalit teacher stated:

As a Dalit I'm very aware of prejudice and discrimination; and I feel sad to see that non-Dalit, even after securing higher education and societal awareness, continue to practise the hierarchy of caste. (p. 195)

Caste-related intolerance often takes the form of 'avoidance'. For example, if a high-caste lecturer learns of a Dalit lecturer's sharing the same academic position in the same institution, there is a greater chance that the Dalit staff member will be ignored and excluded by higher-caste faculty in social gatherings and informal meetings. Such forms of discrimination have marginalised Dalit students and faculty to the extent that their progress within higher education is regularly impeded (Pais, 2007).

2.7 Outcomes of Quota Policy in Practice - Dalit Recruitment Patterns

Prejudice against the Dalits by non-Dalits has affected the process of deploying the Quota seats designed for Dalit access, and this has had a conspicuous adverse effect

on Dalit recruitment to higher learning institutions (Srinivas, 2008). Nationwide statistics on Dalit access to higher education were last compiled by the University Grants Commission (UGC) in 1996-1997. Since that time, neither the UGC nor the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), nor the Scheduled Caste (Dalit) Commission, have produced any further statistical data in relation to this topic. The UGC attributes this deficiency to the failure of many colleges and universities to submit data in a usable form. Due to the limitations of the data collected by these government organisations, the present research will make additional use of statistics collected and compiled independently by academic researchers (Srinivas, 2008). The government's failure adequately to monitor the 15% of university places allocated by the Quota System for the Dalit is especially problematic, as it limits the capacity for critique and subsequent policy reform.

Srinivas (2008) explains that the enrolment of Dalit in higher education is very low, in spite of the government's Quota policy (p. 293). Dalit applicants make up approximately 7.2% of the total enrolment in Indian universities (**Table 1**). By 1997-98, the Dalits had occupied, on average, just 7% of the Quota seats allocated over the previous twenty years (based on data collected in 1978-79). Their enrolment continues to remain low compared to that of their non-Dalit counterparts. Moreover, even this minimal access to higher education is challenged by some non-Dalit (high-castes), who agitate for the reversal of the Quota policy. This policy dispute has contributed to the government's failure to enforce the 15% Quota reservations consistently across India.

With these caveats in mind, however, it is still useful to examine the statistical data on Dalit enrolment to be found in the public domain, as they offer some insight into recruitment to higher education.

Table 1. Enrolment of Dalit in Higher Education in India

Date	Non-Dalit	Percentage	Dalit	Percentage
1) 1978-79	2,337,221	(91%)	180,058	(7%)
2) 1988-89	3,488,087	(91%)	279,720	(7%)
3) 1995-96	5,532,998	(89%)	496,872	(8%)
4) 1996-97	5,898,407	(89%)	512,291	(7%)
Average		90%		7.2%

Source: S. Srinivas Rao (2008), 'Equality in Higher Education: The Impact of Affirmative Action Policies'. In Thorat, S., & Kumar, N. (Eds.), *In Search of Inclusive Policy: Addressing Graded Inequality* (p. 86). New Delhi: Rawat Publications.

Rao (2002) has drawn on data provided by the National Survey Sample Organisation (NSSO) for 1999-2000 (**Table 2**) to report on Dalit who have achieved postgraduate degrees. The NSSO highlights that Dalit access to higher education in 1999-2000 was still well short of the 15% Quota allotment (p. 322). Despite the substantial expansion of higher education in the post-independence period, with increased numbers of universities and colleges across India, the level of Dalit student enrolment in higher learning institutions remains very low. Indeed, Dalit representation in certain disciplines was almost negligible in 1999-2000, as shown in Table 2. For example, of those achieving a postgraduate qualification in engineering, only 2.2% were Dalit. Meanwhile, Dalits made up as few as 1.8% of medicine postgraduates, and 1.3% of postgraduates with other technical degrees. These high-status degrees are especially significant as they allow individuals to access elite, well-paid professional occupations. The total percentage occupied by Dalit postgraduates of all of the professional courses is also extremely low (about 1.7%) as compared to non-Dalit (95.6%). It seems fair to say, therefore, that the enrolment of Dalit is insignificant despite the 15% Quota seats reserved for their access to higher studies (Rao, 2002, p. 323).

Table 2. Percentage of Dalit on Technical Postgraduate Courses in India, 1999-2000

Course/Subject	Dalit	Non-Dalit
Engineering	2.20%	98.00%
Medicine	1.80%	97.00%
Other technical degrees	1.30%	92.00%
AVERAGE	1.7%	95.6%

Source: S. Srinivas Rao (2002), *Dalit in Education and Workforce*, Vol. 37, No. 29 (July 20-26), pp. 2998-3000.

The proportion of Dalit on high-status professional courses is far from satisfactory (Rao, 2002). Low levels of Dalit participation in courses of study which lead to high-salaried jobs highlight the government's negligence. It seems that the government's ameliorative programmes exist only on paper, with no effective implementation measures taken. Thus, although 15% of university seats are allotted for Dalit access to higher education according to the Quota System, there is still a wide gap in enrolment between Dalit and non-Dalit applicants (Rao, 2002).

In addition, Sheth (2004) claims that the representation of Dalit in teaching positions in Indian universities is very low (p. 217). In his Human Development Report to the United Nations Development Programme (**Table 3**), Sheth (2004) described Dalit recruitment to university teaching positions. In the report (which made use of statistics from 1992-93), he charted a mere 2% presence of Dalit academics within small independent (public and private) colleges across the northern regions in the Indian states of Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar (p. 221).

Table 3. Designation and Position of Dalit Faculty in Teaching Departments/Colleges (1992- 93)

Designation	Total	Dalit	Percentage
Professor	3338	32	0.96%
Reader	5837	104	1.78%
Lecturer	10191	328	3.22%
AVERAGE			1.9%

Source: D. L. Sheth (2004), *Reservation Policy Revisited*. In Panandikar, V. A. (Ed.), *The Politics of Backwardness: Reservation Policy in India* (p. 96). New Delhi: Konark Publishers Pvt. Ltd.

The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) has provided no more recent data on Dalit faculty recruitment. This is perhaps due to a lack of systematic analysis, undue statistical discrepancies, and/or a failure to consider studies undertaken in universities in other regions of India (Sheth, 2004). Moreover, it is extremely difficult to obtain reliable current data on Dalit faculty in higher education, as there is no systematic monitoring procedure for this area of policy and practice, despite the Quota System's 15% reservation of academic posts. In particular, no substantial research has yet documented the experiences of those few Dalit faculty members who do manage to enter high-status, 'Ivy League' universities in India.

2.8 Discussion

Since the adoption of the Constitution in 1950-52 and the setting up of the Quota System, there have been no substantive changes to the affirmative action taken to reserve places in educational institutions for members of the Dalit community. Even after sixty years of this policy intervention, the overall position of the Dalit has barely improved. They remain at the bottom of the educational pyramid, despite the government's repeated claims for the effectiveness of its efforts to uplift the Dalit community. As far as Quota seats in higher education are

concerned, the government has made no concrete assessment of its Quota policies over the last six decades (Gnana *et al.*, 2002; Thorat, 2009).

The promises made in India's Constitution to support Dalit access to higher education seem to have been a mirage, due to the lack of adequate budgetary allocation and minimal commitment among policy makers to filling the reserved quotas. In addition, India's political parties have consistently neglected the monitoring and implementation of the policy. Caste-based discrimination is rife throughout India, perpetuated by state and non-state actors alike, and state political parties have thus far failed to implement laws or review policies related to the under-implementation of the Quota measures (Kumara & Jones, 2008). In general, the Indian ruling class continues to support casteist (caste-biased) and communal parties, including the Bharathiya Janata Party (the BJP), a Hindu supremacist political party which has incorporated caste categories into its policies (Kumara & Jones, 2008).

An upper-caste mindset is dominant in India both in high-level institutions and among its most powerful groups, as is evident from most of the anti-reservation commentaries (Chalam, 2007). Concerns about 'merit' continue to circulate. Talking of 'merit' rather than caste discrimination is one means of ensuring that the Brahmin caste remains dominant. A focus on 'merit' sidelines the lack of opportunities that lower-caste families still experience on a daily basis in India (Hooda, 2001). Merit continues to be defined through an examination system that benefits non-Dalit who have privileged access to the means to excel (Deshpande, 2008).

High-caste non-Dalit still consider themselves to have a 'right of access' based on their position in India's hierarchical caste system, often disparaging the Dalit as people of 'no caste' (Jogdand, 2007, p. 52). Non-Dalit opponents of the Quota System policies allege, first, that Quota policies militate against merit and allow

degrees and qualifications to be awarded to those who are less than deserving in terms of aptitude and performance. Second, they argue that the Quota System is inefficient compared with openly competitive systems. Third, it is alleged that inequalities within the Dalit community allow the 'creamy layer' (Jenkins, 2003) to take advantage of the reservations while depriving the rest of the community; this is taken as proof that the "Quota System is not working as intended" (Ghosh, 2008, p. 234).

Undeniably, the effects of India's caste hierarchy continue to obstruct the progress of the socially disadvantaged Dalit, who are often excluded from mainstream formal education under the pretext of religious sanctions that impede their access to mainstream culture and society more broadly (Verma & Singh, 2005). Few government ministers or bureaucrats work to preserve the constitutional rights accorded to and established for the Dalit. The promises made by government officials often remain unfulfilled (Nambissan, 2002; Satyanarayana, 2005). Prabhakar (2005) believes that many Dalit consider politicians and government bureaucrats to be self-seeking and dishonest in their refusal to "support the progress and upliftment" of the Dalit communities (p. 114). More importantly, the Quota policies are hardly ever discussed at the level of national government (Jogdand, 2007).

Institutions reluctant to support the inclusion of Dalit students and faculty find it relatively easy to undermine the Quota guidelines. Institutions often get away with minimal adherence to the Quota System, and sometimes none at all, since no attempt is made to monitor or assess the functioning of the Quota policies, and no penalties are enforced for exploiting loopholes in the system. Methods of improving the lives of the mass rural Dalit are rarely discussed when government legislation is developed (Deshpande, 2008). In addition, Srinivas (2008) claims that the efforts made to assimilate the Dalit into India's higher educational system are often poorly

matched to their learning needs, and the system is inhospitable to them at both a cultural and a social level.

Education policy in India, as elsewhere, is driven by a combination of political and financial interests. Crucially, most private investment in higher education is concentrated in the high-status disciplines of engineering, medicine and management, and consequently does little for the majority of the Dalit. Until very recently, India's state governments had virtually ceased to expand the list of government-aided institutions, thereby increasing the number of "self-financed" or "private unaided institutions" (Kapur & Mehta, 2007, p. 49). With the increasing privatisation of universities and colleges, higher education in India runs the risk not only of catering solely for the economically prosperous, but also of denying services to under-privileged Dalit communities. In recent years, there has been little discernible change in India's education system in terms of generating greater equity and social justice, particularly for the Dalit. Indeed, recent attacks on the Quota System on the basis of 'merit', along with emerging policies to privatise the educational sector, have further excluded the Dalit (Singh & Malik, 2001; Jogdand, 2007; Amman, 2008).

In this chapter, I have examined the role of the Quota System in India. I have demonstrated the weakness of its policies: few individuals from the larger Dalit population access higher education, and there is still only a small Dalit academic work-force. Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that the Quota System policy has been of some use over the past decades in promoting some Dalit access to higher education, and continues to support that cause even today. However, significant political commitment will be necessary to implement the Quota System in full: to ensure that the Quota reservations are adequately inspected and monitored, and that responsibility and accountability are clarified. In the final analysis, the "Dalit issue is not merely a Dalit concern; it is a human rights issue" (Pinto, 2008, p. 78).

Chapter 3

The Dalits in Higher Education: a Research Perspective

3. Introduction

This chapter forms part of an attempt to provide a framework for the empirical study that follows. The purpose of the chapter is to present an indicative review of existing research on the Dalits. The research studies on Dalits in higher education addressed here date from the late 1970s through the early 1980s and '90s, with work done as recently as 2006-2007. Much of the extant quantitative and (in far shorter supply) qualitative research on Dalits of both genders in higher education is located in the larger northern Indian states (Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Punjab, etc.), and sometimes the southern Indian states (Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka), with a focus on Dalits in rural and small-town colleges/universities. These studies have made principal use of questionnaires and interviews to gather data on the educational situation of the Dalits.

This chapter also offers a brief outline of the experiences of Dalit faculty members and the issues they encounter within the university environment as a result of their caste. This aspect is an under-researched area, especially with reference to elite universities. The chapter then provides a critical review of those few studies on Dalit females, with particular reference to their representation and experiences in higher education. As previously stated, most of the research studies addressed in this chapter focus specifically on the situation of the Dalit in rural and small urban colleges and universities. However, the final section of the chapter stresses the

importance of further empirical study of the grounded experiences of Dalit (students and faculty) in the light of the government's Quota policy (see Chapter 2). Here, the foundations are laid for an exploration of the Indian government's Quota provisions and their impact on Dalit recruitment and access to higher education, as well as the participation of Dalits (both faculty and students) within the elite university setting.

3.1 The Dalit Situation

Much of the early research published on Dalits' access to and progression within higher education was limited to studies based in rural areas and small towns in the northern and southern regions of India (Sunderaj, 2000). This work has been carried out primarily in the rural regions of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Punjab and some areas near Bihar (see map in Fig. 1 on the next page), along with a smaller group of studies focusing on the southern states of India (Jaiswal, 1998).

Fig. 1

Map of Indian States



Scholars have tended to focus on rural Dalit in the northern regions of India (who comprise a large percentage of those residing in villages and rural towns in India as a whole), with some attention also paid to the southern parts of India. This is due, first, to a lack of knowledge concerning the social and educational lives of Dalits in rural areas and small towns: research on Dalits in higher education in these areas initiated an important research trend addressing the much larger population of Dalits residing in the villages and small towns of these Indian states (Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Bihar, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, etc.). Secondly, due to the ever-

increasing rate of atrocities practised against the Dalits, and a lack of information on their recruitment to higher studies in local government colleges and institutions, the northern and southern regions in the above-mentioned Indian states (especially the rural areas and small towns) became areas of particular interest to researchers (Mishra, 2001).

Most studies have been quantitative in their approach, and conducted in small and not particularly prestigious colleges in rural areas, as well as large and medium-sized urban colleges spread across the north-western regions of India, with a lesser emphasis on the southern states. Many of these studies have highlighted the presence of strict Hindu caste-religious sanctions that regiment social life, and limit the educational access of Dalit communities to the colleges/universities concerned (Sharma, 1994; Mishra, 2001; Jeffery *et al.*, 2005). These studies claim that caste-religious dominance has provided the upper castes with a disproportionate number of places in higher education. This in turn has gained them powerful mechanisms of social control, perpetuating their dominance over the lower castes – the Dalit (Mishra, 1989; Singh, 2002).

For the most part, research studies on Dalits have been carried out in the rural and small-town sectors of India, where the vast majority of the Dalit population is to be found. The personal testimonies of a small number of recently educated Dalit document experiences of segregation practised intentionally in educational institutions, especially in the northern states of India (Sharma, 1999). It has thus been necessary for researchers to highlight the social and educational lives of the Dalits in these regions, especially in light of the government's Quota reservation policy, which came into force in the early 1950s. Despite the establishment of the Quota System to promote the Dalit community's access to education, the Dalit continued to face obstacles in their access to, and progression within, higher education. Due to the weakness of the government's policy in this regard, as well as its failure to adequately implement and maintain the Quota procedures, and its lack

of consistency in distributing educational benefits to the Dalit across many states in India, the Quota System has received considerable criticism (Hooda, 2001). It became vital, therefore, that researchers address the issue of Dalit access to higher education in order to uncover the predicament of the rural Dalit at large. For this reason, rural and small-town regions became focal points for research. Much of the literature at hand on Dalits places particular emphasis on the social and political connection of caste with culture, authority and influence, religion, identity, and so on (Singh, 2002; Naidu & Brumot, 2006).

While much research has focused on rural areas, far less emphasis has been laid on Dalits in highly urbanised regions, including those who have gained admission to elite universities as part of the 15% Quota reservation scheme (Scheduled Castes 8% and Scheduled Tribes 7%). Little attention has been paid to the impact of the Quota policy on these individuals' access to and participation in higher studies, as well as their direct personal experiences of caste discrimination within the elite university environment to which they belong, whether as students or faculty members. It is crucial, therefore, that we seek to explore and understand the experiences of male and female Dalits, including faculty members, within higher educational settings, especially elite universities. We must conduct thorough qualitative research into the experiences of Dalit in large urban centres, rather than rural regions (Jefferey *et al.*, 2005), and ascertain their views on Indian higher education in the wake of the Quota policy, particularly within the elite university setting. Research in this area has yet to be comprehensive: more studies are needed to explain the influence and impact of the Quota policy on Dalit development in higher education across all states and all types of institutions in India (Chalam, 2007). As noted in the previous chapter (Chapter 2), the 15% reservation for Dalit applicants has never been achieved (Government of India, 1952-1992; DeLiege, 1997; Mohanty, 2003).

3.2 Peopling the Research: the Dalit Situation in Higher Education

In this section, I will examine existing research on Dalit education in higher education institutions located primarily in the rural and small-town sectors of North India, where a large Dalit population is to be found. As previously mentioned, due to the lack of research on the educational and social lives of the Dalits, the few northern states of India that house a large Dalit population have become an important venue for research in this field. In order to contextualise the present study, therefore, it is important to determine what, and how much, we know about Dalit students and faculty of both genders in higher education. This will be addressed in the following analysis of existing research on the Dalit situation.

3.2.1 Locating Research Studies on the Dalit (1970s)

Mishra's (2001) research on the obstacles faced by rural Dalit communities during the 1970s draws on studies carried out in the late 1970s by Singh *et al.* (1979) and Sachchidananda and Gangrade (1979), in order to highlight the significance of the Dalits' educational marginalisation. A common theme to arise from the research conducted during the late 1970s was the government's negligence in implementing the promised educational upliftment for the Dalit. The government failed to provide adequate Quota scholarship schemes for both Dalit applicants and those continuing to higher education (Mishra, 2001). Policies such as government-subsidised tuition and accommodation fees for the Dalit were rarely implemented. Few Dalit students benefited from a congenial atmosphere for proper study, and most found it difficult to follow college curricula (Mishra, 2001). In schools, for example, the "failure rate among Dalit students, and the lack of educational support" provided for them by staff members, were both considerable; factors which contributed to their lack of involvement with higher education institutions (Mishra, 2001, pp. 126-129). Although the studies conducted in the 1970s offered evidence of constitutional

neglect of the Dalit, the lack of educational facilities and the repressive character of the educational system, Mishra (2001) notes that most of the research carried out in the northern regions “failed to provide in-depth analysis and systematic collection of data”, as well as lacking a degree of sensitivity to the Dalit situation (p. 130). Mishra acknowledges studies carried out by the early researchers (Singh *et al.*, and Sachchidananda & Gangrade, among others) in small higher educational institutions in India. However, it has since become necessary for scholars to address the educational challenges faced by the Dalits in a more thorough way, especially due to the failure of institutions to provide adequate data on Dalit application and recruitment, and in spite of the Quota System introduced by Dr. Ambedkar in the early 1950s to improve Dalit access to higher education.

3.2.2 Situated Studies in Rural and Small Urban Regions (1980s – mid-2000s)

During the 1980s, the impetus to investigate and understand the problems facing the Dalit communities saw a widespread increase across various regions in India. It was felt to be particularly important to assess the rate of discrimination practised in the heavily Dalit-populated regions of rural and small-town areas (Chitnis, 1981). One area chosen for investigation by Chitnis (1981) was the northern region of Uttar Pradesh, where research focused on the Dalit situation in rural higher educational institutions. Other locations for Chitnis’ research included the north-western states of Punjab and Rajasthan, and the southern states of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, due to the high population density of the Dalit in these states. Much of this research took a specific focus on the issue of caste bias and its influence within the Dalits’ educational context, with reference to the effects of caste discrimination on Dalits’ rights in the wider context of Indian society (Chitnis, 1981).

Chitnis (1981) undertook an investigative study of 250 Dalit students enrolled on undergraduate college courses across the Indian states of Uttar Pradesh (U.P.),

Punjab and Rajasthan (northern India), and Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka (southern India). He noted that when Dalit students were asked about ill treatment due to caste status, 71% of the 250 students under study reported having been negatively affected by caste prejudice (p. 147). Chitnis used questionnaires as his primary method of data collection. These included biographical questions as well as those gathering information about students' educational level (year of study, etc.), teachers' attitudes, and politics. The research findings were compiled for use primarily by "governmental and administrative policy makers", as well as others concerned about the position of the Dalit community (Chitnis, 1981, p. 11). Although Chitnis' questionnaires were broad and speculative in character, they sought to provide some insight into the existing situation, and to suggest directions for further exploration of Dalits' experiences. Chitnis (1981) believed that his study indicated the need for further research in the fields of "anthropology, sociology, and education" (p. 11).

In 1984, Satyanarayana explored the educational problems faced by Dalit undergraduate students in small-town colleges located in Karnataka State. The focus of his research was the usurpation of Dalit students' privileges by their non-Dalit peers, along with related problems faced by Dalit students. Questionnaires were administered to around 260 Dalit students, of which 217 were male and 43 female. The sample was confined to "B.A. (Arts), B.Sc (Science), and B.Com (Commerce) students" (p. 137). The study highlighted issues such as a lack of adequate government scholarships for Dalit students, and a limited choice of colleges; moreover, it found that tutors and professors often insisted that Dalit students enrol on courses with places available, rather than studying subjects of their own choice. Satyanarayana's (1984) results vividly illustrate the ongoing nature of discriminatory attitudes and practices against the Dalit. While his study concedes that a limited number of Dalit saw some improvements, such as a small "increase in the number of Quota scholarship" recipients and successful graduates

amongst Dalit students, this progress was extremely slow relative to that of higher castes (pp. 137-143).

However, Satyanarayana's (1984) investigation did not include Dalit enrolled on postgraduate courses (M.A., M.Sc., M.Com., Ph.D) or professional courses such as Medicine, Engineering and Law (p. 3). It failed adequately to represent Dalit females, tending to focus instead on the issues faced by Dalit males. Nevertheless, Satyanarayana (1984) did point to gaps in the research that needed further investigation, especially the disparity between the constitutional Quota policy and the actual implementation of Quota measures in government-owned and private educational institutions (p. 143).

A study by Mishra (2001) carried out between 1999 and 2000 focused on a comparison between first-generation Dalit learners (born in the 1950s) and those of the second generation (born in the late 1970s and early 1980s). The population of the study comprised Dalit males attending small-town colleges in the Meerut region of Uttar Pradesh. The sample consisted of 43 randomly selected intermediate colleges in the region of Meerut. It involved dependent variables such as achievement, adjustment, attitude and problems; and its independent variables were first- and next-generation learners within the Dalit community. The tools used to measure the obstacles faced by the learners under study were "Asthana's Adjustment Inventory, the Students' Attitudes Inventory and the Mooney Problem Check-List" (Mishra, 2001, p. 136). In dimensions such as achievement, adjustment and problems, Mishra found no significant differences between first- and second-generation Dalit. The research suggested that some movement towards social and economic equalisation for the Dalit (both first and second generations) had been made, although they continued to remain undervalued in educational institutions. However, the study included only Dalit males, and it was also region-specific. Mishra (2001) affirmed that our understanding of the Dalits' situation within higher

education would be greatly augmented if similar studies were conducted in a wider variety of regions across India.

In their 2005 study of Dalits' educational and socio-political views, Jeffery *et al.* reported that the educational facilities provided by the government for Dalit students in rural Uttar Pradesh were poor across all levels of the education system. Teacher/professor absenteeism and negligence were common phenomena. The study was carried out in the Bijnor district. Its concerns were again broad-based, ranging from Dalits' perceptions of college education, employment, and political activity to their social environment. Data were drawn from two government-aided, male-only colleges in rural areas: "Bijnor College, with a total student body of 1,500; and Arya Samaj College, with 285 students" at the time of the study (p. 43). Data collection involved semi-structured interviews with Dalit male students, but the study does not disclose the precise number of interviewees. Jeffery *et al.* (2005) highlighted the breakdown of formal monitoring systems, and institutionalised corruption amongst state-employed professors, as well as government apathy with regard to investing in education. The study identifies a crisis in educational quality in Uttar Pradesh, stressing the limited opportunities which cannot but have a "profound negative effect" on Dalit seeking educational advancement (p. 45).

Jeffery *et al.* (2005) argue that, paradoxically, promoting the Dalit community's access to higher education could further entrench social exclusion by exposing Dalit students to discriminatory attitudes and processes within the formal, informal and/or hidden curricula. The research uncovered and documented caste discrimination in textbooks, bullying and exclusionary behaviour carried out by teachers or peers, and high failure and drop-out rates amongst Dalit students. However, Jeffery *et al.* (2005) believe that more research studies are needed to explore and examine how Dalit "outside of rural regions perceive the potential of urban formal higher education" to change their lives (Jeffery *et al.*, 2005, p. 258).

Another study in U.P. was undertaken by Mohammad (2006), who aimed to identify major “socio-economic parameters such as education” and involvement, as well as determinants of the socio-economic transformation of Dalit individuals and their circumstances (Mohammad, 2006, p. 4). The research was centred on four regions of U.P., with 40 rural towns and 10 urban centres (small towns) selected for in-depth study. It was based on both primary and secondary data. The former were generated by means of questionnaires and field observations, while the latter involved analysis of various governmental and quasi-governmental sources. The study sampled 299 Dalit and 398 non-Dalit student respondents (Mohammad, 2006, p. 12). The results indicated that 13.3% of the non-Dalit students were “moderately” educated (holding Bachelor’s degrees) and 1.76% were “highly” educated (to Master’s level). In total, 6.02% of the Dalit were moderately educated, and 0% highly educated. Not a single Dalit student involved in this research fell into the “highly educated” category (p. 63). Mohammad’s (2006) study also found that Hindu religious practices within village hierarchies restricted Dalit involvement in education to an initial stage, and that there was considerably more prejudice in these areas against Dalits’ receiving education. A lack of financial stability, and limited government response and provision of resources (scholarships, subsidised tuition, etc.), also contributed to the small proportion of educated Dalit graduates (Mohammad, 2006).

In 2006, Naidu and Brumot conducted research to assess how the socio-economic conditions and perspectives of the Dalit affect their education in both rural and small urban towns. Their empirical study was conducted in Pondicherry, in southern India, and sampled from 5 rural areas and 3 small urban towns, comprising 1,822 young Dalit respondents in total. The techniques employed for data collection included participant observation, group discussion, and informal conversation (p. 254). Corroborating the results of Mohammad’s (2006) research in U.P., which indicated an extremely low proportion of Dalit graduates, Naidu and Brumot’s (2006) research found that only “4.63% of Dalit held Bachelor’s degrees,

and 0.89% Master's degrees" (p. 254). Naidu and Brumot's (2006) study revealed the "negative attitude of high-caste Hindu" educators to the educational development of Dalit students (p. 254).

Both Mohammad's (2006) and Naidu and Brumot's (2006) research studies indicate the dramatically lower educational achievement of the Dalit in comparison to non-Dalits at a college/university level in rural villages and small towns in India. Although much of the research cited above addresses Dalits as part of India's higher educational environment, scholars have rarely if ever sought to explore the grounded experiences of Dalit students and faculty in relation to higher education. Nevertheless, the existing research certainly sets a stage for further exploration and analysis of the experiences of those few privileged Dalit individuals who belong to India's higher educational environment.

Moreover, given the lack of attention thus far paid to the experiences of Dalit faculty members in higher education, this area of study requires considerable further exploration, especially in the under-researched setting of urban elite universities across India. The previous chapter (Chapter 2) cited a limited number of examples, such as Sheth's (1997) report of the discrimination suffered by a Dalit Professor of Mathematics; Zelliot's (1996) account of the experiences of a Mahar (Dalit sub-caste) academic; and a short report on the Dalit faculty presence in the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT, Chennai, 2006). However, while all of these examples offer a valuable glimpse of the situation of Dalit faculty in the higher educational sphere, they do not fully cover the grounded experiences of Dalit faculty members. Tees *et al.* (2007) claim that research studies on the lived experiences of Dalit faculty and students in "IITs [Indian Institutes of Technology...] as well as in other reputed public universities, are [almost] negligible" (p. 217). Furthermore, reliable data on Dalit faculty in higher education is particularly hard to access, as there is no systematic monitoring procedure for this area of policy and practice, despite the Quota System's 15% reservation of

academic posts for Dalits. Information on those few Dalit who gain academic jobs in premier universities is particularly difficult to access. Tees *et al.* (2007) believe that the context of elite technical colleges/universities in India – rather like that of large elite universities – “needs to be properly researched and explained” (Tees *et al.*, 2007, p. 218).

The research studies on Dalit students in rural and small urban colleges/universities carried out between the late 1970s and 2006 were an important step for researchers at the time, whose purpose was to understand and highlight the educational predicament of the larger Dalit population in the northern and (more rarely) the southern regions of India. Indeed, these studies may be regarded among the most important sources of information of recent years concerning the educational context of the Dalit community in rural areas and small towns. Other significant research studies have addressed various aspects of Dalits’ social, economic and political lives, including caste ethnicity/affiliation, caste culture, religion, profession, etc. All of these studies continue to inform research today, offering us a glimpse of the Dalits’ situation in colleges/universities, and the challenges they have faced in the realm of higher education. The research studies discussed in this chapter also form a platform and build an impetus for further empirical studies of the Dalits’ higher educational life outside rural and small-town colleges/universities – and especially in the context of the urban elite universities explored in this thesis.

3.2.3 Research Studies on Dalit Females in Higher Education

This section will consider some of the research that explores the experiences of Dalit females in higher education. Dalit women are discriminated against both within the Dalit movement, by Dalit men; and within the women’s movement, by non-Dalit women. Acute discriminatory practices against Dalit females are often

particularly prevalent in rural areas (Indira & Nagaraju, 1997; Seenarine, 2004; Beteille, 2006). Dalit females' representation in higher education is still very low across many regions within India (Seenarine, 2004).

In financial terms, the Dalit are more vulnerable than the remainder of India's population, and this is especially the case for Dalit females (Mishra, 2001). Drawing on Bindu's (1979) research study conducted in a small region in Uttar Pradesh, Mishra (2001) reports that literacy among Dalit females in higher education at the time of the study was very low, especially in rural areas, and that little or no importance was placed on their higher educational achievement (Mishra, 2001). Among other factors, the failure to maintain academic calendars, inconsistency in the quality of education, and a lack of satisfactory support for Dalit females (such as the provision of scholarships and other aid), all act as impediments to the progression of Dalit females in India's educational environment (Pandya, 2004).

Kabra's (1991) research focused on the general higher educational 'backwardness' of Dalit female students, with particular reference to their backgrounds, peer groups, and relationships with teachers. Kabra used a pre-prepared questionnaire to collect data. The sample comprised 200 Dalit female participants from colleges/universities in four different north-western districts, composed of both rural and small urban areas across Rajasthan State. Non-Dalit females were included in the sample (sample size not disclosed) for comparison (Kabra, 1991, p. 22). The study found that although a few Dalit females had advanced educationally, they still encountered significant challenges in small colleges/university settings in Rajasthan due to their caste affiliation as Dalit. According to Kabra (1991), "Dalit educational development in Rajasthan was thus uneven", and Dalit female students in particular had made significantly less academic progress than their non-Dalit counterparts, due to their caste (p. 149).

From his review of a wide range of small-scale studies, Mehra (2000) argues that only a small percentage of Dalit females access higher education in colleges, universities and professional institutions in India. His study addressed the problems and tensions experienced by female Indian college students, as well as their educational aspirations, fears and hopes (p. 7). Mehta (2000) found that Dalit females comprised only 0.5% of his sample of 443 students, of which “98.25% were members of non-Dalit” upper castes (Mehta, 2000, p. 262). As part of his study, a questionnaire was prepared to elicit the values, perceptions, and aspirations of college/university females in one town in Punjab State in North India. Questionnaires were administered randomly to more than 600 female college/university students. 443 completed questionnaires were returned. Of the 443 responses, almost none were from Dalit females (Mehta, 2000, p. 263). The research offers no definite explanation for this minimal response, but assumes either that the Dalit females were reluctant to participate in a survey focusing on personal feelings, values and educational aspirations, or that they had minimal or no representation (such as Dalit groups/organisations) in the colleges/universities under study. However, Mehta (2000) does not specify the size of the Dalit female student population in these institutions, or speculate as to how many may or may not have received the questionnaires distributed at that time and place.

The results of Mishra’s research, conducted in a rural northern district of Uttar Pradesh in 2001, indicated that more than four of every five Dalit females face barriers to higher educational access and opportunities due to low family income, discouragement, or lack of parental guidance. In comparison, Mishra found less than half of the non-Dalit females under study to “face such problems” (p. 23). At the time of the study, only “35,294 Dalit females, as compared to 646,709 non-Dalit females”, were enrolled in higher education institutes in U.P. (Mishra, 2001, p. 24). In his view, educational policies and programmes have failed to comprehend the fragmented social reality experienced by Dalit females (Mishra, 2001, p. 28). He believes that although Dalit females comprise one of the most socially oppressed

and economically deprived sections of Indian society, the vast majority of research on Dalit women fails adequately to recognise the difficulties they encounter within their immediate educational environment. Although Mishra's (2001) study offers some insight into the situation of Dalit female students, it would be worthwhile pursuing further research into the experiences of female Dalit in large urban centres.

In the mid-2000s, Seenarine (2004), a male Dalit Ph.D researcher, chose to study female literacy and higher educational attainment in the southern rural region of Bidar district in Karnataka State. Bidar is the most educationally 'backward' district in Karnataka, with a literacy rate among females of only 55% (Seenarine, 2004, p. 58). Seenarine selected 33 Dalit women and girls at random from a small rural college in Bidar district. The study used open-ended interviews to collect data on Dalit female respondents' social and economic characteristics, in order to understand their lives in rural Bidar. Its main topics and sub-themes included personal and family characteristics, "caste, social and gender relations, and access to educational opportunities" (Seenarine, 2004, p. 9). Seenarine's (2004) study indicates that factors contributing to the low enrolment of Dalit females within India's education system include a lack of schooling facilities and financial help; discriminatory treatment by non-Dalit faculty; parental indifference; and the perceived irrelevance of education. In general, he found, the discriminatory attitudes held by non-Dalit either lower the educational goals of female Dalit students, or make them indecisive about their plans for the future (Seenarine, 2004). The Dalit females in this study recognised their vulnerability to ongoing discriminatory treatment, as well as the need to realise their educational goals in the long run; in practice, however, the prejudice they face cannot but restrict their higher educational development (Sesha & Humiston, 2010).

Discrimination against the Dalit in higher education continues to prevail, yet all too often goes unnoticed. Drawing on a wide range of studies, Mishra (2001) concludes

that most Dalit fall victim to bullying from their non-Dalit high-caste peers and teachers: they are often forced to eat separately, refused service in college canteens, made to wash their own utensils, and denied college hostel rooms next to high-caste Hindus. At times, they “suffer physical violence from non-Dalit Hindus” in hostels, and may be discouraged from speaking in class, or ignored by professors (p. 230). Numerous incidences of discrimination against Dalit students are believed to go unreported. The Dalit are widely underestimated and frequently described as inferior or less significant by educators and their largely high-caste fellow students alike. Lakshmi *et al.* (1999) observe that college lecturers often discriminate against even the most brilliant Dalit due to their own caste affiliation, and the threat these students pose to the educational advancement of other, non-Dalit students.

Benefiting from improvements – albeit minimal – to the availability of education and modern educational facilities, some Dalit (especially members of the ‘creamy layer’; see Chapter 8 for further details) have been able to attain slightly better economic positions. Weiskopf (2004) claims that “reservation policies [...] favour a creamy layer, and perpetuate invidious caste distinctions [which] are unquestionably the points most frequently raised by critics” (p. 33). Yet gaining this edge over other members of the Dalit community may encourage ‘luckier’ individuals to associate themselves with equivalently placed persons from other castes, and even to exploit members of their own caste. Those Dalit in better socio-economic positions have been reported to hold prejudiced attitudes (Jenkins, 2003; Rana, 2008). Indeed, it is suggested that elitism is a growing problem within Dalit communities, sharpening the divide between educated and non-educated Dalit, and often thereby compromising the unity of their respective communities. Yet measuring this effect is difficult. Rana (2008) cites the Chairman of the University Grants Commission (UGC), who claims that to assess the problem adequately “one would have to compare the Dalit classes [i.e. creamy layer and non-creamy layer] displaced [in] university admissions by reservation policies”. However, “such data do not appear to be available” (p. 189; see Chapter 8 for further details).

3.3 Critical Analysis – Call for Further Research

In this chapter, I have provided an account of selected existing research published on the educational and social context of the Dalit in India. I now wish to subject this overview to an analysis that seeks to identify any gaps or insufficiently researched areas in the field. My aim is to ensure that my thesis does not only provide an update on what is known in the field, but makes its own original contribution.

The issues explored in this section are as follows:

- spatial/contextual issues;
- issues raised by different groups of Dalit in an elite university setting; namely women, faculty members and students;
- issues concerning the government’s adoption of the Quota System, originally designed to promote Dalit access to higher education institutions.

Much of the existing research on the subject of Dalit in higher education is region-specific: concentrated in rural and small-town colleges in the regions of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Karnataka, among others. While in the past there were good reasons for narrowing the field of study in this way – especially to underscore the particular social predicaments faced by Dalit communities in the regions of U.P., Rajasthan, etc. (Jaiswal, 1998; Mishra, 2001) – much has changed in India in recent years. In spite of the growing visibility of the Dalit on various educational and professional courses, Dalit have progressed only to a certain limited extent (Kamble, 2002). For example, Dalit living in large cities have been increasingly able to gain access to good schools and higher education institutions (Yagati, 2007). However, the extent to which the fulfilment of Dalit students’ educational objectives is accompanied by caste bias or prejudice in urban universities remains open to investigation.

Scholars have rarely examined the situation of Dalit faculty members in university settings (Sheth, 2004). Research that does explore the experiences of Dalit faculty is generally used to illuminate broader issues of caste bias (Zelliot, 1996; Pais, 2007). None of these writers seek directly to explore or contextualise the personal experiences of Dalit faculty in higher education, and the reasons for their success or under-representation in the university setting have not been closely examined.

More importantly, little attention has been paid to the role of the Quota policies and their impact on Dalits' entrance to and experiences within higher educational settings. Although some studies have explored the impact of the Quota System, usually recommending a fuller implementation of its policies, these reports have themselves been affected by the bureaucratic inertia which has led to the widespread failure to reserve 15% of university places for Dalit applicants (Thakur, 2006; Chalam, 2007). Another outcome of this inertia is the failure to collect statistics documenting Dalit faculty recruitment. No data are available, for instance, from the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) (Sheth, 2004; Ramotra, 2008). Great difficulty is involved in accessing reliable data – or sometimes any data – on Dalit faculty in higher education, as there is no systematic monitoring procedure for this area of policy. The quantitative data sets available for Dalit access to higher education are piecemeal, partial, and, in some parts of India, simply non-existent. While it is possible to gain some sense of the extent of Dalit access and participation, the picture is by no means systematic or complete.

Research centred on the experiences of urban Dalit women in higher education is similarly limited (Mehta, 2000, Seenarine, 2004). There is some literature on the social background, “employment and professionalisation” of educated Dalit women (Mehta, 2000, p. 250); however, further study is required to ascertain their views on the influence of the Quota policy on the recruitment to university of successful Dalit female candidates, as well as the caste bias they encounter, overtly and/or covertly, from Dalit and non-Dalit males in the urban university environment (see

Chapter 7 for further details). Studies of Dalit and non-Dalit female students in small-town colleges/universities (Indira & Nagarajuna, 1997; Seenarine, 2004) have focused on the changing social positions, values, and attitudes of non-Dalit female students as compared to those of Dalit students in their immediate educational environment (Mehta, 2000; Mishra, 2001; Seenarine, 2004). Dalit females continue to “face obstacles to their access” to educational institutions, as well as their progress within such institutions (Sen, 2002, p. 198). However, the extent to which caste continues to influence government policy (specifically the Quota policy) with regard to the selection and recruitment of Dalit women remains largely ignored in the corpus of research studies in this field (Mehta, 2000; Seenarine, 2004; Gaijan, 2007). The Annual Dalit Report of 2009-2010 claims that the issue of Dalit females in higher education is “too large to encapsulate [...] hence the need to address gender studies exclusively” (p. 35). It is necessary, in other words, to map in full the experiences of Dalit females in higher education (Pashar, 2004, p. 171). While such a complete mapping is beyond the scope of this study, I hope nonetheless to shed some light on the issues faced by Dalit women through discussion of their current experiences within the realm of elite higher education.

It is evident from this chapter’s review of existing research that very little work has been undertaken in certain locations, such as cities, or within elite universities whose high status makes issues of selection particularly acute. In these elite settings, the Quota policy may have a critical role to play in faculty appointments, as well as student enrolment. Although researchers have tended to focus on Dalit studying in rural educational institutions, there is more to be learned about their experiences in India’s leading universities. For example, the situation today of second-generation male and female Dalit students and creamy-layer urban Dalit students (born in the late 1970s and the early 1980s) in large metropolitan areas may require further exploration to contextualise their experiences in higher education (Mishra, 2001).

Studies that document the experiences of those few Dalit who do manage to enter higher education institutions are in particular demand (Mishra, 2001), especially in order to ascertain whether or not the Quota System is working to assist Dalit individuals in these high-status institutions. More specifically, further research in this area is needed for two key reasons. First, little is currently known about the experiences of the Dalit within these elite settings. Second, such universities confer the highest status and greatest opportunities in life on their students and faculty. They bestow great cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1990), and facilitate access to highly rated occupations and prestigious careers. These institutions are internationally renowned, and their statements of mission and vision explicitly reject exclusion and discrimination as antithetical to their work and role. It is thus important to begin exploring the degree to which access to and participation within these settings is equitably distributed, not least in terms of the Quota System's 15% reservation policy. Gaining direct insight into the experiences of current Dalit students and faculty within an internationally acclaimed university setting will prove a valuable starting point.

Further research is also required to explore Dalit participation in, and experiences of, higher education. Few studies, for example, have explored the involvement of Dalit students in higher degree programmes (M.A., M.Com, etc.) (Satyanaryana, 1984; Mishra, 2001) and professional courses (M.B.A., M. Eng, computing degrees, etc.) with a view to contextualising their pedagogical experience in the light of Quota policy measures (Kapur & Mehta, 2007). Those that have done so have tended to focus solely on Dalit males. Comparative studies of Dalit and non-Dalit male/female students in postgraduate education, along with research on Dalit faculty members in elite universities, are entirely absent (Mehta, 2000; Seenarine, 2004).

3.4 Rationale for My Research on Dalit in Higher Education

Caste discrimination in India, both in educational settings and more broadly, has had many debilitating long-term consequences, particularly for the Dalit. Discrimination against the Dalit has reduced their attendance in schools, and often deters them from applying to universities. Submitting an application for a high-status 'Ivy League' university is a very risky process, making Dalit individuals far more likely to apply instead to local universities (Chalam, 2007).

According to Thorat and Kumar (2008), little research has been carried out on the twin issues of Dalit access to, and progression within, prominent higher education institutions in metropolitan areas of India. Despite the government's establishment of a commission specifically designed to scrutinise Dalit admittance to higher education to date, there remains a lack of strict monitoring measures to assess the problems caused by caste bias, or even to gather data on the recruitment of Dalit students and faculty members to 'Ivy League' universities. Explicit and unambiguous data on the Quota seats made available for Dalit access to professional faculty posts at such universities have yet to be collected (Chalam, 2007). The Dalit Annual Report of 2008-2009 claimed that "systematic empirical studies on the nature, forms, and magnitude of discrimination [against Dalit] are inadequate", and that "serious gaps exist in crucial areas such as social exclusion [...] inter-group conflict, and policies for dealing with the consequences of exclusion" (p. 11). The Dalit Annual Report of the following year (2009-2010) claimed, in addition, that "issues leading to [Dalits'] social exclusion in urban areas [...] are also yet to find a place in the research domain" (p. 6).

Therefore, this study aims to explore and examine the experiences of Dalit students and faculty at one elite university: the University of Shah Jahan (pseudonym) in Kanpur State (pseudonym). The university offers a diverse range of programmes – from the arts, sciences and commerce to business administration and management –

and houses engineering, medical and polytechnic institutions. It attracts students from all over India. For these reasons, the university serves as a useful case study by means of which to explore the impact of caste prejudice in higher education today, especially with regard to the Quota System policies for supporting Dalit students and faculty within elite institutions. There is significant competition for entrance to the University of Shah Jahan, and its intake is dominated by applicants from the highest social strata in India, making this an ‘acute’ case in which to explore Dalit experiences, caste bias and other related issues. With places at this university in such demand, it seems likely that opposition to the Quota System is also more in evidence.

Therefore, my core exploratory questions are as follows. First, what kinds of (caste-influenced) experiences have shaped or affected the access of Dalit faculty members to the University of Shah Jahan, and their progression within the university environment? Second, what kinds of experiences do Dalit students encounter within a high-status university, in both formal and informal settings? These concerns will be addressed with the assistance of probing questions (see Chapter 4 for further details) with the purpose of ‘adding knowledge’ to the existing research in this field, as outlined above. The research study seeks to analyse the grounded accounts provided by Dalit students and faculty members of their current experiences in an elite university setting. This empirical study will be unique, as it sets out to fill the gaps in existing research concerning the experiences of the Dalit within elite urban institutions. Moreover, it will inform scholarly understanding of the impact of the Quota System policy in a particular institution. Finally, it seeks to situate and lay the groundwork for future research in this area.

In the following chapter, I will set out my methodological approach, providing details of the methods and research design that will structure my empirical work. It is this to which I now turn.

Chapter 4

Methodology

4. Introduction and Research Questions

This chapter outlines the methodology and research processes employed in my empirical study. The first section will provide a theoretical account of qualitative research, along with my justification for choosing this method. Second, I will reflect on what is involved in case study work, and explain its suitability for this research study. Third, I will elaborate on the tools utilised in this research for data collection, with particular reference to the interview process and, very briefly, the fieldwork notes. In the fourth section, I will explain the use of ‘coding’ and the procedural intricacies involved in analysing the data collected. Issues of reflexivity and positionality will be covered in the penultimate section. Finally, I will discuss the ethical ramifications of the research study, followed by a summary of key points in my concluding remarks.

Research Questions

The key questions guiding my study and its design are as follows:

- What kinds of (caste-influenced) experiences have shaped or affected Dalit faculty members in their access to, and progression within, the University of Shah Jahan?
- What kinds of experiences do Dalit students (as learners) encounter within a high-status university, in both formal and informal settings?

In order most accurately and fully to explore these concerns, a number of additional research questions have been designed, as follows:

- What is the role of the government's Quota System policy in helping the Dalit to gain access to higher education?
- How do differences within the Dalit community shape the experiences of Dalit students within one elite university setting? How successful is the government's Quota System policy in helping the Dalit to gain access to higher education (given their internal differences)?
- What kinds of experiences shape or affect Dalit female students (both creamy-layer and Quota Dalits) in their access to and progression within the University of Shah Jahan?

These questions are addressed in the relevant data-led chapters. Their purpose is to explore and analyse the participants' current situation within higher education (Robson, 2002), with reference to each of the study's primary concerns, as follows: (1) *what* is the nature of Dalits' experiences in an elite higher education institution? (2) *why* do certain forms of discrimination continue to thrive in institutions that uphold educational achievement? (3) *how* far has the concept of equal opportunities been realised in the Indian higher education system?

4.1 Rationale for a Qualitative Methodology

I have selected a qualitative approach as most appropriate for my exploratory research study. Strauss and Corbin (1998) explain the qualitative methodology as a "process that seeks to ascertain the words and actions of the participants studied" (p. 6). The method is principally concerned with capturing participants' direct experiences in their natural setting in order to produce a thick and rich description of the phenomena under study (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Patton, 2002). Unlike

quantitative analysis, a qualitative methodology is oriented towards the discovery of knowledge without the aid of statistical procedures or any other means of quantification (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). My contention is that qualitative research techniques have become “increasingly important styles of inquiry” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 1); they are now, for instance, in extensive use by researchers to “investigate issues related to education” (Burgess, 1985, p. 4; Patton, 2002). A qualitative method allows the researcher to deploy a wide “range of interconnected interpretive practices”, and thereby to gain a better understanding of the subject matter at hand (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p. 4). As Tesch (1990) argues, a qualitative approach is an “important mode of inquiry” in the educational sphere, with considerable potential for generating new theories and observations (p. 45). As such, it is particularly applicable to my area of study.

Patton (2002) argues that qualitative findings stem, in general, from three kinds of data collection, namely “in-depth open-ended interviews, direct observation, and written documents” (p. 4). Bryman (1988) describes the approach in broader strokes as “the sustained immersion of the research investigator with a view to generating a rounded, in-depth account of the individual, group or organization under investigation” (p. 45). Using qualitative methods, I hope to gain insight into my participants’ worldview(s) as grounded in their direct experience of elite higher education in India. Accompanied by an “element of interpretation” (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003, p. 50), a qualitative focus will also assist in the investigation and analysis of the “kind of views participants share”, as well as helping to determine “what is actually going on” in their lives (Gillham, 2000, p. 10).

Examining the participants’ lived experiences – including their emotions and feelings, as well as the awareness they have of their environments – is a crucial part of my study (Bell, 1999; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). A qualitative approach is “fundamentally well suited for locating the meanings of [the] events, processes” and so on that structure individual lives (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10).

Silverman (2005) believes that a “qualitative approach could be favoured” if the researcher is exploring people’s life experiences in a given setting (p. 6), because such an approach “describes and understands human behaviour [...] and seeks to capture the voices of individuals as they are” (Lichtman, 2010, p. 40). The particular strengths of qualitative analysis are thus suited to my attempt to understand in a nuanced way the participants’ “context, setting, experiences and personal views” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 54) with reference to elite university education in India.

Furthermore, I have chosen to develop in my study what Marshall and Rossman (2006) identify as the five essential characteristics of a qualitative approach, which seemed most fitting, in practical terms, for my research method. First, qualitative research is naturalistic; second, it draws on a series of methods that respect the humanity of the participants in the study; third, it focuses on context; fourth, it is emergent and evolving; and finally, it is both interpretive and grounded in the lived experiences of the people involved (p. 2). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) believe that studying individuals in “their natural settings” allows the researcher to “interpret or make sense of the phenomena” that each individual experiences (p. 3). Therefore, such an approach supports my study’s purpose of describing and analysing the participants’ “experiences from their own perspectives” (Bryman, 1988, p. 46).

Insofar as a qualitative approach fulfils “an ethical responsibility to address processes encountered” (Madison, 2005, p. 5) by a community within a particular domain, it is particularly appropriate to my study of a minority (Dalit) community in a higher education institution. Such an approach enables questions to be asked about the “historical forces shaping societal patterns”, as well as the fundamental “issues and dilemmas of policy, power and dominance”, both within institutions such as universities, and in Indian society at large (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 7). The goal of qualitative research is not only to accumulate knowledge but also to pursue the “emancipation of [the] participants” involved in the study (Silverman,

2006, p. 274). For these reasons, a qualitative methodology is held to be the most appropriate means of exploring the individual experiences of the participants involved in this research (Silverman, 2006, p. 274). A qualitative approach enables the researcher to study selected cases in great depth and detail, and has the potential to “generate a rich text of data” from cases involved in the study (Patton, 1987, p. 9).

4.1.1 Ontology and epistemology influencing the methodological choices

Qualitative research depends on context-specific and reflection-oriented interpretation; it is this mode of analysis that constitutes the qualitative process (Knoblauch *et al*, 2005). As Hatch (2002) argues, “qualitative researchers have attempted to define their work in many different ways” (p. 6). Biber and Leavy (2011), for example, claim that “the focus of qualitative research” is the “social meaning people attribute to their experiences, circumstances, and situations” (p. 4). Biber and Leavy (2011) go on to state that “qualitative research [...] uses a process-oriented approach to knowledge-building”, adding that “it is necessary to first understand the major dimensions of research”, which include “ontology, epistemology, methodology, and methods” (p. 4). Insight into these dimensions of research aids the development of appropriate “research questions and strategies for conducting the research” (Biber & Leavy, 2011).

Epistemology is “the study of the nature of knowledge and justification” (Schwandt, 2001, p. 17, cited in Carter & Little, 2011, p. 1317). In the research context, it deals with “ways of knowing and the researcher’s belief system about the nature of knowledge” (Klenke, 2008, p. 16). Carter and Little (2007) add that “[e]pistemology is key to assessment of the quality of data and of analysis” (citing Angen, 2000, p. 1321). This case study of Dalits’ experiences as students and faculty in an elite university will create knowledge which is a result of the “specific

interactions” between interviewer and interviewees within the “specific context of study” (Carter & Little, 2007, p. 1319). It will thus add to existing scholarship by providing new knowledge of Dalits’ experiences in an elite university, and by constantly reflecting on the research process: taking into account both the subjectivity of the research respondents (Dalit and non-Dalit) and the researcher’s (that is, my) subjectivity in carrying out the explorative research (Carter & Little, 2007). My role as researcher involves “recording and studying interactions [in which respondents of the study] bring issues and problems to life by talking about them” (Carter & Little, 2007, p. 1319). It is also important to ask questions in a “non-leading, depersonalized manner”, “elucidat[ing] the essence” of the respondents’ experience by observing as far as possible their “real attitudes, motivations, and beliefs” (Carter & Little, 2007, p. 1320).

Goldman (1986) claims that “epistemology has traditionally been concerned with [...] the endorsement of particular methods or procedures” (p. 96), and is a significant determinant of methodology (Carter & Little, 2007). Carter and Little (2007) also point out that as “methodologies justify methods, and methods produce knowledge, so methodologies have epistemic content”. “[M]ethod, methodology and epistemology are intimately, intricately connected”, and the nature of their connection may determine not only “objectives, research questions, and study design”, but the manner of “analysis and interpretation of findings” (Carter & Little, 2007, pp. 1320-1325). The impact of epistemology on research takes a number of forms. In the following, I will briefly highlight three facets of this influence in relation to my study. First, the choice of epistemological approach “influences the relationship between the researcher and the participant” (Carter & Little, 2007, p. 1321). Participants act as “active contributors” when the researcher is able to “report their attitudes and values accurately” (Carter & Little, 2007, p. 1321). The researcher, therefore, in Hatch's (2002) words, “seeks to understand the world from the perspectives of those [participants] living in it” (p. 7). By this means, the researcher remains hidden, and his/her work is “as unobtrusive as possible” (Carter

& Little, 2007, p. 1321). Second, “epistemology influences the way in which quality of methods is demonstrated” (Carter & Little, 2007, p. 1321). It is important to verify one’s observations and check transcriptions “carefully [...] against the recordings” made of participants’ responses (Carter & Little, 2007, p. 1321). It is also important to “look for misrepresentations or errors in participants’ accounts”, and to “check whether the participants agree with the analysis” (Carter & Little, 2007, p. 1322). Finally, “epistemology determines how the researcher communicates with his or her audience and the conceptualization of the role of the audience, the analyst, and the participants in the work” (Mantzoukas, 2004, cited in Carter & Little, 2007, p. 1322).

Moreover, Carter and Little (2007) claim that “textbooks often present ontology, along with epistemology, as a foundational element of qualitative research” (p. 1326). The process of selecting particular epistemological and ontological foundations for research is enlightened and influenced by history, culture and philosophy (Crotty, 1998; Klenke, 2008). Transparency is necessary to any study (Crotty, 1998); and understanding the philosophical bases of ontology and epistemology is essential in order to rationalise one’s research method and the final result (Klenke, 2008). As Crotty (1998) claims, epistemology “is a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know” (p. 3). Carter and Little (2007; citing Blackburn, 1993; Bruner, 1990) assert that “[o]ntological questions are questions about the nature of reality” (p. 1326). However, this is a complex matter; for as Hatch (2002) believes, “multiple realities exist”, “constructed by individuals who experience the world from their own vantage points” (p. 15). Hatch (2002) goes on to state that researchers and participants are “joined together” and “through mutual engagement [...] construct the subjective reality that is under investigation” (p. 15). This then informs the methodological process, wherein “researchers spend [...] time interviewing participants [...] in their natural settings in an effort to reconstruct the constructions participants use to make sense of their worlds” (Hatch, 2002, p. 15).

According to Carter and Little (2007), epistemology is “surrounded by axiology”, insofar as the “knowledge that is generated” in a research study is usually “discussed, evaluated, and justified in relation to broader cultural values” (pp. 1322-1323). Findings may be justified “as knowledge, as some kind of truth”; however, the researcher must also “evaluate” this knowledge, “comparing the values of [his/her] participants to [his/her] own values and those of the participants” (Carter & Little, 2007, p. 1323). In my role as researcher, I must understand the Dalits’ social reality as being co-constructed by individuals (in this case the Dalits) who interact within and derive meaning from their world in an active way (Chalam, 2007). In this study, I approach the search for truth in Dalits’ lived experiences through interpretation (D’Souza, 2009).

Crotty (1998) argues for the importance of ontology, which “is concerned with ‘what is’, with the nature of existence, with the structure of reality as such” (p. 10). He adds that ontology, along with epistemology, “inform[s] the theoretical perspective”, and that “ontological issues and epistemological issues tend to emerge together” (Crotty, 1998, p. 10). Ontological assumptions may determine epistemological and methodological characteristics; indeed, Crotty (1998) reports that “writers in the research literature have trouble keeping ontology and epistemology apart conceptually” (p. 10). Biber and Leavy (2011) add that “describing the nature of reality” is particularly important for researchers in the social sciences, whose “data are largely derived from human subjects who [within an ontological and epistemological framework] become viewed as objects for research processes” (p. 8). In the context of this study, the subjects are the Dalit participants. In order to gain a fuller understanding of the experiences of the Dalit, it will be important for me to investigate explicitly the philosophical foundations on which my research is developed (Cohen *et al*, 2003). It is also important for the researcher to reflect on his or her own positioning in terms of ontology, epistemology, methodology and data-gathering, in order to identify the

philosophical assumptions which underpin the research method (Biber & Leavy, 2011).

4.2 Methods

Although I have chosen to take a qualitative approach, my research was conducted in one elite university, Shah Jahan. Thus, my work might usefully be described as a qualitative case study, which addresses the case of one university and one community – Dalit living in India.

Therefore, this section presents an explanation and description of the case study approach. My developing understanding of the research will be charted, and the reasons for my choice of the empirical case study method explained. For any empirical research project, Munhall (2000) considers it vital to gain an “understanding of how a researcher is going to use a given method, and how that method works” (p. 19). This is especially true of this study, given the flexibility of the case study approach and the range of methods it employs.

4.2.1 Case Study

Yin (2003) defines a case study as follows:

[an] in-depth investigation/study of a single individual, group or community, or an empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon within its real life context [...] it is about understanding the uniqueness, complexity and interaction of the participants involved by holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events [...] [It] provides insight into an issue and has no specific methods of data collection or analysis [...] and

uses whatever method that seems appropriate and practical as a method of enquiry [...] and is often better approximated within a small number of cases that are closely related to one another. (pp. 18-19)

The case study method seeks to describe a real environment, very often within a single organisation (such as a university), and requires the researcher to capture that reality in considerable detail. This is especially appropriate for my study given that one of my chief research objectives is to focus on the reality of individual – or individuals’ – experiences (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) with reference to “underlying reasons in people’s feelings or perceptions” of events (Gillham, 2000, p. 7). This reality may be accessed by studying “individual activity in the real world, which can only be understood in context, and that which exists in the here and now” (Gillham, 2000, p. 1). As the present study focuses on the events and phenomena experienced by individuals in a contemporary (university) setting, a ‘partial’ case study approach is my chosen method of enquiry (Silverman, 2006, p. 13; Simons, 2009). By ‘partial’, I mean that I will not be undertaking a full case study of the University of Shah Jahan. That is beyond the scope of a single study. Instead, I shall be carrying out a case study of a particular community (Dalit faculty and students) within one elite setting.

This study sets out to explore, analyse and gain insight into a ‘single case’ situation (i.e. the university setting) featuring individuals of a particular group of interest (the Dalit people). The case is thus discussed “in its context” (Robson, 2002, p. 89). Research is carried out in its “natural location” (the University of Shah Jahan; Robson, 2002, p. 89) in order to explore the characteristic patterns of university life for Dalit students and faculty members. The participants’ individual experiences are “situated and observed in context”, with interviews taking place within the university setting (Bassey, 1999, p. 23). Since individual experiences form an integral part of the case study approach, it is through the analysis and interpretation of how individuals think, feel and act that many of the insights provided by this

research will be attained (Simons, 2009, p. 4). The study sets out to be “evaluative”: highlighting key issues that participants (including academic faculty members and students) encounter in the educational setting, and seeking to “describe, interpret, and or depict events” uncovered in the course of the research (Simons, 2009, p. 41).

Yin (2003) adds that the case study method has the “unique strength” of empowering the researcher to ask useful questions. The method is “adaptive and flexible”, and gives the researcher a firm grasp of the issues studied (p. 8). The researcher can ask ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions in order to gain a full understanding of the nature and complexity of the processes taking place. As Simons (2009) observes, the case study method enables the researcher to “document multiple perspectives, explore contested viewpoints, and [...] explain how and why things happened” (p. 7). For the present study (i.e. the experiences of Dalit individuals in an elite institution), the ‘how’, ‘what’ and ‘why’ questions are exploratory, and lead in most instances to the use of case studies (Yin, 2003; Simons, 2009).

There are, however, limits to the case study approach. Yin (2003) claims that the method’s disadvantages lie in an alleged “lack of rigor”, as well as the potential “sloppiness of the investigator”, and the “small basis [provided] for scientific generalization”. Furthermore, Yin argues, producing an effective case study may take too long, and can result in “massive, unreadable documents” (p. 9). However, the method provides a valuable framework for my research, as it has particular advantages in the exploratory phase of an interview-based investigation – it is an “appropriate explorative tool” (Yin, 2003, p. 3) – and helps the researcher to understand “the complexity of interviews in particular contexts” (Bassey, 1999, p. 36). Furthermore, Bassey (1999) identifies an element of “trustworthiness that highlights the ethic of respect for truth in the case study approach” (p. 74). With this in mind, my attention now turns to the university chosen for my case study analysis.

4.3 Context

4.3.1 Setting: The University of Shah Jahan

The University of Shah Jahan (pseudonym) is situated in a large city in one of the largest states in India, and is among the country's most sizeable higher education institutions. It has been awarded a very high ranking by the Indian National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC). The university includes several high-status research institutes, and is ranked among the top universities worldwide. More than 100 colleges around the city are affiliated to the university, each independently hosting a diverse range of courses, from arts, science, commerce, business administration and management to engineering, medical and polytechnic institutions. The university has some major campuses, and several thousand students are enrolled on the various degree programmes. Numerous affiliated colleges offer undergraduate courses, while the main university campus offers additional graduate courses that include, among others, M.A., M.Sc, M.B.A., M.C.A., M.B.B.S., M.E. and Ph.D qualifications. Each department functions separately and houses a very large number of staff members (including professors, associate professors, assistant professors and lecturers).

The university attracts a variety of students and faculty members from both within India and abroad, and upholds the need for equality among faculty and student members. Indeed, the university makes the following explicit commitments in its 'University Pledge':

Equality and respect should be promoted and practised towards both university teachers [i.e. faculty members] and students, from whom and with whom one gains both knowledge and understanding. (translated to English from the original Sanskrit of the Shah Jahan University Pledge)

We can infer from this pledge that Shah Jahan strives at least on paper to promote inclusion and egalitarian beliefs, and to embrace the heterogeneous communities studying at the university.

It is worth noting at this stage that science, medicine and engineering are considered in India to be high-status professional subjects. Courses in the fields of the humanities and social sciences fall into the 'low status' bracket. This is due, in part, to the fact that the fields of science and technology have acquired considerable recognition in India, whilst the humanities and social sciences continue to struggle for national acceptance (Chaudhary, 2009). In the Indian labour market, graduates with high-status qualifications (in medicine, engineering, computing, etc.) are more readily employed than those from low-status subject areas (history, sociology, philosophy, etc.). The steady growth of a market-based economy in India today places particular emphasis on professional and technical degrees (medicine, engineering, I.T.), such that graduates with professional degrees tend to acquire lucrative jobs that offer power and prestige. This is not the case for graduates with degrees in humanities and the social sciences (Chaudhary, 2009). As Agarwal (2007) contends, this growing trend could "determine the [relative] value [of] professional diplomas and degrees, and other graduate degrees in India" (p. 34).

4.3.2 Access to Participants and Presence in the Field

In this section, I will explain the method used to access participants for the research study, and describe the means of recruiting candidates for the interview process.

Gaining access to the research setting and participants, and obtaining formal permission to carry out research, "are vital to any study" (Holloway, 1997, p. 20).

In particular, access to participants is a crucial part of the research process (Robson, 2002). In this case, contact with the participants was gained first through

negotiation with various departmental heads, including those of the sociology, engineering and psychology departments. The study made use of overt access methods: informing participants of the nature of the research and obtaining their agreement, often with the help of ‘gatekeepers’, which are a necessary and convenient means of gaining right of entry to an institution (Silverman, 2001) (see Appendix B & C for further details).

The concept of a gatekeeper is frequently invoked in sociological and anthropological research, and refers to those in a position to “permit access to others for the purpose of interviewing” research participants (Miller and Bell, 2002, p. 55). Holloway (1997) considers “gatekeepers to have the power to grant or deny access, as they are located in a different place in the hierarchy of the organisation, and those at the top of the hierarchy are usually considered to be the most influential” (p. 21). Gatekeepers’ power may be “exerted in a variety of ways”, depending on their relation to the participants involved in the interview process (Miller and Bell, 2002, p. 55). With the assistance of my gatekeeper, Dr. Rathod (pseudonym), and his close acquaintance with the university’s Vice-Chancellor, access to the university setting was granted without any hindrance. Dr. Rathod, a non-Dalit, is a former Vice-Principal of a prestigious college, and former Head of the School of Social Sciences at the University of Shah Jahan. As I expected, gaining initial access to individual faculties of the university also required my gatekeeper’s assistance and support, which made the process much easier. His close association with the university’s Vice-Chancellor enabled me to select and gather my interviewees (both faculty and students) quickly and efficiently. Furthermore, Dr. Rathod’s personal connections with several professors and heads of department (in the fields of management, history and engineering, among others), proved greatly beneficial to the process of gaining interviewees for my study. With the assistance of these faculty members, I was able to secure access to classrooms and lecture halls. Since the university houses many departments within the fields of science and the humanities, I was also advised by my gatekeeper to draft a letter to

each head of department requesting access to my research participants in the form of interviews (letter provided in Appendix L).

In order to locate participants for my study, I attended course lectures and seminars to identify Dalit students to take part in the interview process. I was assisted by either a lecturer or another student to become acquainted with them. In order to gain access to classes and lectures, permission was sought from each of the relevant professors. The number of students varied in the classes I attended, with courses in the humanities and social sciences boasting a particularly large cohort of students. For example, attendance at sociology classes usually comprised between forty and fifty students. Certain science courses, including biology and chemistry, had approximately fifty students per class, whereas medical classes were much smaller. However, engineering, law and business courses had a far larger cohort of students than the fields of either medicine or ‘hard’ science. There were considerably fewer Dalit than non-Dalit students in all of these classes, although the Dalit presence in social science classes was noticeably larger than in the fields of medical science, engineering and computer studies. Some examples of this discrepancy will be highlighted in the course of data analysis in Chapter 6.

While care was needed in obtaining access to Dalit male participants, especially in light of the “sensitive issues” raised by the research (Sieber, 1993, p. 17), accessing Dalit female participants was at first an even greater concern, due in part to my own positionality. Bearing in mind that accessing research participants is “crucial” to the research process (Miller & Bell, 2002, p. 55; Lee & Renzetti, 1993), securing female interviewees was a much more immediate concern than locating male participants, especially as the interview context (a male interviewing a female) touched upon gender sensitivities within Hindu culture.

Silverman (2001) warns that “the researcher should not ignore gender issues in research” (p. 60). However, with some assistance from a faculty member

(dependent on their availability), I was able to overcome this potential challenge early in the research process. The issue of gaining access, therefore, was not as complicated as I had feared; indeed, access to all of the research participants was obtained with ease, allowing me to meet the planned schedule for interviews very comfortably.

4.3.3 Pilot Study

In this section, I will briefly explain the process of carrying out a pilot study, which is used to collect initial data before the inception of the main interview process.

Holloway (1997) describes a pilot study as a “small-scale trial run of the research with a very small number of participants chosen by the same criteria” as those for the research proper (p. 121). My fieldwork began with the development of a pilot study to test the conceptual framework and operational measures to be used in the case study itself (Yin, 2003, p. 7); that is, to test my “ideas and methods and explore their implications” (Maxwell, 2005, pp. 56-57). Maxwell (2005) adds that pilot studies help the researcher to develop an understanding of the “concepts and theories held by the people you are studying and the meaning that these phenomena and events” have for the individuals involved (p. 58). As such, they are a key component of the study and its theoretical foundations (Maxwell, 2005).

The pilot study comprised a small number of in-depth semi-structured interviews with approximately twelve Dalit student participants, all of whom were also involved in the final study. Access to classrooms was initially gained with the assistance of a faculty member, allowing me to observe and identify the Dalit students enrolled on each course. After holding a meeting with Dalit students on humanities courses, I obtained feedback from those who expressed an interest in taking part in my research study. Due to the fact that fewer Dalit students were

enrolled on science courses, it was more convenient for me to include only those who showed an interest.

Six participants were then chosen from the various arts/humanities and science subject areas. This initial phase allowed me to begin exploring issues such as the reasons for high Dalit enrolment on arts/humanities courses, and obtaining details of the students' experiences in the university (both formal and informal). The pilot study was also useful for testing the research tools (see Appendix D for a draft and finalised version of the interview schedule). It was an efficient means of gaining important "preliminary data, highlighting gaps, considering significant issues, as well as helping in understanding [myself] as a researcher" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 57). More broadly, this process provided a valuable introduction to the university's Dalit postgraduate students, giving me a better understanding of the subject I intended to explore (Maxwell, 2005).

The pilot study also suggested useful revisions to the interview questions; I decided, for example, to include additional questions dealing with the competition between merit and non-merit-based university places, and the recruitment of Dalit faculty members. Moreover, the pilot study process required me to reword and/or translate my questions in keeping with the participants' own languages (Richey & Klein, 2007, p. 50). For example, I asked probing questions in either Hindi (the common language of the respondents) or the Malayali language for those respondents who preferred to speak in their own regional dialect. Using the respondents' own languages was a more effective way of framing questions to explore their experiences of university life. It also enabled me to reflect on their responses with greater understanding of their experiences (Maxwell, 2005; Saldana, 2003).

The following section offers details of the research samples taken. It also explains the sampling methods employed in the data collection process, and how access to the participants was negotiated for the purpose of conducting interviews.

4.3.4 Sample and Sample Construction

Samples and sampling procedures are an important element of qualitative research (Silverman, 2000). The sample for this study was constructed over a limited time period, and 57 participants were interviewed. I relied on a combination of purposive, theoretical and snowball sampling approaches (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Patton, 1990; Silverman, 2010). The initial selection process was followed by close observation of the participants during class sessions. They were then narrowed down further, and selected, in part, using purposive sampling, on the basis of particular “features” (as Dalit) or “characteristics” (as a minority group) (Silverman, 2010, p. 139). The purpose here was to enable “detailed exploration of the research objectives” (Silverman, 2010, p. 139; Patton, 1990). A snowball sampling technique was also used: Dalit participants “with characteristics of interest” were chosen, “who then identified individuals they knew with those similar characteristics” (Patton, 1990, p. 58; Bell & Nutt, 2002).

Together, these two sampling strategies allowed me to locate and recruit Dalit participants, a group not easily reachable by other means (Patton, 1990). Both the method of purposive sampling (used during the early stages of the interview process) and that of snowball sampling (used for the major phase of the interview process) proved useful means of collecting data for further qualitative analysis. Theoretical sampling was also carried out during the designated time-period; to which end, for example, I was careful to ensure that the sample included female students of the Dalit caste. The data gathered was used to fulfil my research objectives with the ultimate aim of filling the research gap described in Chapters 2 and 3. The purposive and snowball methods of sampling (involving others of the same community, and functioning extremely well due to the support of the Dalit student participants), were balanced, in part, by this theoretical sampling approach, which required the support of my gatekeeper, Dr. Rathod. Dr. Rathod’s assistance was particularly useful in terms of recruiting faculty members (Dalit and non-Dalit)

as well as a few students from various postgraduate departments (see Appendix K for a list of postgraduate disciplines).

The total number of Dalit and non-Dalit students (male and female) involved in the study was forty-four (see Table 1). The faculty members numbered eleven (see Table 2). Two additional participants were involved: one, a government policy maker for higher education; the other the Vice- Chairman of India's State Minorities Commission.

STUDENTS

Table 1

	Male	Female	Total
Dalit	25	15	40
Non-Dalit	2	2	4
Total	27	17	44

FACULTY

Table 2

	Male	Female	Total
Dalit	7	2	9
Non-Dalit	2	0	2
Total	9	2	11

As noted above, my initial access to faculty members (especially non-Dalit individuals) was facilitated by my gatekeeper. It transpired that one of Dr. Rathod's key contacts, a non-Dalit faculty member, was also his ex-colleague. Following a formal introduction, the assistance of my gate-keeper's ex-colleague allowed me to secure yet another non-Dalit faculty recruit for my interview sessions. After my initial contact with both non-Dalit faculty members, I shared my research proposal, indicating what I hoped to achieve and what their participation would mean for my

study, especially in light of their experiences and views of the Dalits' current situation in the setting of Shah Jahan. Both generously agreed to take part in the interview process, and made open and frank responses to the questions posed during interview. I was also able to secure access to Dalit faculty members with ease, which was especially important due to their limited numbers in various departments across the university. In summary, the recruitment of both Dalit and non-Dalit faculty members for the interview process (with some initial assistance from my gate-keeper) did not pose a significant challenge.

However, gaining access to non-Dalit students was more difficult. Reasons for this included their disinterest in the subject matter, or prior personal commitments; others did not want to be associated with a study that seemed 'political', while some expressed little or no knowledge of the issues facing the Dalit community. Eventually, after much effort, I recruited four non-Dalit students: two males, one from the engineering department, and the other studying medicine; and two females, one on a psychology course, and the other from the chemistry department. The non-Dalit students reported during interview that they had attended good grammar schools, and came from professional middle-class backgrounds.

By contrast, the Dalit student participants – who formed the bulk of the interview sample – described diverse social and economic backgrounds. A small number came from professional middle-class homes. Individuals from this background are also known as the 'creamy-layer' Dalit (for details see Chapter 8), who are born and bred in the city and have access to good schools. Other Dalit participants hailed from lower middle-class origins, and some from working-class families; the majority had been born and raised in rural areas, but had migrated to the city with their families in order to secure better life opportunities.

Almost all of the interviews with the Dalit participants (student and faculty) took place on the university campus. However, interview sessions with the Vice-

Chairman of the State Minorities Commission took place within the privacy of the Chairman's own office, while the interview with the government policy maker for higher education took place at a coffee-house catering for senior government employees.

4.3.5 Research Tools Employed

In this section, I will describe the methods used to organise the interviews and fieldwork. The processes involved in gaining access to interviewees are detailed, and potential impediments to the interviews outlined.

4.3.5.1 Interview and fieldwork data

Qualitative interviews are used extensively in the field of educational research, as they enable the researcher to gather rich descriptions of respondents' experiences, opinions and interpretations of the phenomena under study (Powney & Watts, 1987). Patton (2002) suggests that qualitative interviewing is "meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit", and that the interview process finds out "what is in and on someone else's mind" (p. 341). Such interviews should be more "focused, more in-depth, and more detailed than ordinary conversations" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 108); and they must be "systematically, critically analysed and interpreted, with fair conclusions drawn" (Bassey, 1999, p. 40). Keeping these issues in mind, I chose to interview Dalit and non-Dalit students and faculty members using semi-structured interview questions with probes (details of the questions/probes used can be found in Appendix D), in order to explore the participants' responses and allow them to express themselves "uniquely" (Hammersley, 2008, p. 96) regarding their experiences of an elite university setting. The questions were also designed to elicit the participants' views on the

“contemporary situation” of the Quota policy for Dalit in Indian society (Yin, 2003, p. 8).

I carried out a total of 57 individual semi-structured interviews (see questions used in Appendix D). The selection of interviewees relied on a combination of theoretical, purposive and snowball sampling techniques (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Bryman, 2001). A few participants invited their friends from other postgraduate disciplines and departments to be part of the research study. Interview sessions were conducted either on the university campus or, less frequently, in coffee-houses. Both Dalit and non-Dalit student participants were selected with the help of two professors accessed via my gatekeeper during the week. The participants were then interviewed individually or in small groups (interviews were carried out twice) in a separate room allocated by a senior professor of the university (who was responsible for allotting a secure venue for the interviews). Most interviews took place during term-time, on days when there were no classes. Weekdays were usually very busy for the student participants, since most had to attend classes and seminars all day. Many participants requested interview slots on Fridays, when most classes were scheduled for only half a day.

The faculty members of the university were individually interviewed in their offices. Initially, the task of securing interviews with members of the faculty had seemed quite difficult, given their busy schedule during term-time. However, a four-week university-wide faculty strike took place during my fieldwork, so I was fortunate enough to gain access to otherwise hard-to-reach faculty members for the interview sessions.

All of the interviews were based on a series of semi-structured, open-ended questions focusing on and contextualising the experiences of Dalit and non-Dalit participants (Kvale, 1997). The use of semi-structured, open-ended questions allows the researcher a level of flexibility, and the opportunity to listen actively,

establish rapport with the participants, and probe their responses (Silverman, 2006, p. 110). Patton (1987) claims that the use of open-ended interviews generates “direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge” (p. 7), and enables the respondent to describe what is “meaningful and salient without being pigeon holed into standardized categories” (Patton, 2002, p. 56). Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) insist that the “researcher must [...] provide the participants” with opportunities to bring up unanticipated topics; it is thus important to be flexible in the choice of each question (p. 16).

Framing questions for the interviews was an important stage of my research process, especially in “terms of what the participant is going to talk about and what will count as relevant that I, the interviewer, am interested in” (Dingwall, 1997, p. 58). The questions were designed to stimulate an “interactive process”, which is considered an essential part of probing the participants’ experiences (Edwards, 1993, p. 185). The questions sought particular information, and thus guided the discussion gently, “leading it through stages” by asking focused questions and encouraging the participants to answer in depth and at length on a defined set of areas of interest (including experiences at university, the role of the Quota policies, issues of prejudice, and so on) (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 110).

The questions constructed for the Dalit students and faculty members were both general and specific, with occasional “emphasis on private and sensitive areas of their lives” (Edwards, 1993, p. 186). In the early stages of the process, certain elements of the questions were similar; the participants’ family backgrounds were ascertained, for example, as well as their previous experiences of education (details attached in Appendix D). Initially, questions were expressed very broadly, allowing the participants an opportunity to speak directly of their own experiences (Flick, 2007). In other words, the use of a semi-structured, open-ended format for the questions encouraged the participants “to be flexible” in their responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 33). Many of the questions included probes, enabling the researcher

to pursue in-depth analysis of the participants' views and experiences, often generating more empirical data about their "social world" (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004, p. 140). They were encouraged to elaborate on their life experiences: religion, culture, family, peers, and so on (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

The questions designed for both student and faculty participants first addressed their family and educational backgrounds. However, the semi-structured interview guides were drafted separately, and the list of questions differed in a few respects to reflect the participants' different experiences of, and perspectives on, certain important matters. Patton (2002) believes that interview questions change over time, and that each new interview builds on those already held, expanding on information that was previously obtained, moving in new directions and "seeking elucidations and elaborations" from participants (p. 342).

All of the interview sessions were audio-taped. Although I had initially intended to conduct the interviews in English, I felt it necessary to use both Hindi and Malayali to accommodate participants who felt more comfortable speaking in their mother tongue. Wenger (2001) suggests that case-study interviews should be conducted in the respondent's first language or dialect whenever possible. Together with some knowledge of their culture, my fluency in the participants' languages – especially their regional dialects – enabled me to develop a rapport with the students and faculty members interviewed.

During the student interviews, I first asked the participants about their family background, their choice of postgraduate studies, their learning experiences, and so on (Edwards, 1993). This proved a useful means of connecting with the respondents and talking without restraint; indeed, the interview process generated a good level of rapport. The relationship between the interviewer and participant is "critical to the process of constructing meaning" from the interviews (Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 128). The interviewer should have "an open mind" (Gillham, 2000, p. 18), and

should recognise the importance of “co-constructing perceived reality through joint understandings” with the interviewee (Munhall, 2000, p. 23).

Kvale (1996) describes the interview process as a means by which the interviewer “seeks to interpret the meaning of central themes in the life world of the subject”, and considers the meaning of *what* is said along with *how* it is said (p. 30). To this end, it is necessary to “immers[e] oneself in another’s world”, and listen deeply and attentively so as to enter into the other person’s experiences and perceptions (Patton, 2002, p. 8). An “openness of exchange” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 13) between interviewer and interviewee (Spradley, 1979) should be developed with mutual respect, “sensitivity, trust and shared understanding” (Sieber, 1993, p. 20).

Cohen *et al.* (2007) opine that “sensitivity inheres not only in the topic under study, but also, much more significantly, in the social context” in which the research takes place (p. 120). They argue that “understanding and responding constructively” to sensitive issues is central to the success of a research study (Sieber, 1993, p. 20). Holloway (1997) adds that “sensitive areas” of the research topic, especially those which involve vulnerable individuals, must be “treated with thoughtfulness and care” (p. 21). For example, since this case study delves into the issues of the already-vulnerable Dalit community in Indian society, the experiences of the Dalit student participants at the University of Shah Jahan demanded privacy and confidentiality. Some of the participants preferred quiet rooms in which to discuss certain sensitive issues, and others wished to avoid public areas.

In the early stages of the interview process, it was important for me to gain a thorough understanding of the Dalit participants’ cultural backgrounds, including their caste affiliation and the distinct customs, values and beliefs upon which Dalit culture is based. I made sure to learn as much as possible about the culture of the Dalit participants before I began to interview them, because an interviewer’s lack of awareness of cultural values may, however unintentionally, lead to embarrassment

and be perceived as improper and/or insensitive (Wenger, 2001). On the whole, this was an easy process, as I had already addressed Dalit culture in my Master's thesis, entitled 'Caste, Quota and Access to Higher Education in India'.

Marshall and Rossman (2006) suggest that the success of a study focusing on individuals' lived experiences – their “thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values and assumptive worlds” – depends on the researcher's understanding of the “deeper perspectives” captured through face-to-face interview sessions (p. 53). During the interview process, I tried to understand how the participants under study “perceive things” (Stake, 1995, p. 12), and attempted to ensure my own sensitivity by avoiding questions that seemed, in my view, likely to add to their discomfort or distract them from the “ongoing flow of their lived experience” (Narayan & George, 2003, p. 137).

Sieber (1993) suggests that:

cultural sensitivity should be used [...] if one has to gain access to individuals in a given culture or subculture, to learn about their actual lifestyles, needs, fears, risks etc., and to communicate in ways individuals understand, believe, and regard as relevant to themselves. (Sieber, 1993, p. 19)

I made a point of being considerate to certain deeply sensitive issues concerning the Dalit community in Indian society today, as well as fostering a sense of openness in dialogues of a sensitive nature. I also sought to avoid intruding into the “private sphere” of participants' lived experiences (Lee & Renzetti, 1993, p. 6). I kept the interview sessions open and flexible, and was ready to follow “unexpected paths” (Narayan & George, 2003, p. 128) that emerged in the course of the interviews. I was occasionally able to reveal some of my own history. In Lichtman's (2010) view, “self-disclosure by the researcher to a certain degree could enable an

authentic dialogue” to take place between researcher and participant (p. 123). Narayan and George (2003) believe that such disclosure may help to deepen an interview: it “inspires the person being interviewed to open up knowing that the interviewer is willing to be vulnerable too” (p. 128).

4.3.5.2 In the field

Silverman (2001) argues that in the process of making field notes, “one is not simply recording data but also analysing them” (p. 65). Patton (2002) agrees that any description of a setting should be “sufficiently detailed to permit the reader to visualize” that setting (pp. 280-281). As Silverman (2005) observes, the researcher’s “presence in the field influences his/her perceptions”, especially of those occupying the field (p. 29). Moreover, Gillham (2000) points out that it is vital to “notice things that one might normally overlook [...] and the important part is keeping a written record” (p. 21). Therefore, field notes were of use in enabling me to describe place, events, mode of interview sessions, direct observation, etc., as well as recording my views and feelings (as interviewer) on how the fieldwork process had developed as a result of interactions with the participants (Ellis & Berger, 2003, p. 168). These field notes took the form of a research diary in which I noted what people were saying and doing and recorded my own responses. The thesis does not draw substantively on this research diary; however, the process of recording my thinking helped me to refine my analysis.

In many of the interview sessions, I took into account short and long conversational pauses (Silverman, 2005), which usually accompanied some disinclination on the respondent’s part to answer certain questions about sensitive areas of their life. Laine (2000) believes that “field-work becomes problematic when researchers cross boundaries of conventional and sensitive topics” (p. 2). The author argues that “sensory details show rather than tell about a participant’s behaviour, sometimes

accompanied with non-verbal expressions such as facial expressions, bodily postures, etc.” (Laine, 2000, p. 147). As the fieldwork developed, I was able to discern a “feeling of acceptance” from the student participants (Silverman, 2005, p. 29) by paying attention to the ways in which the participants experienced my presence as interviewer (Laine, 2000, p. 58). This acceptance was achieved, in particular, as a result of fostering “rapport and trust” (*ibid.*, p. 60). I found it to be manifested occasionally and informally: in participants’ invitations to lunch at the university canteen, for example, as well as informal chats with the participants and their friends about sports, politics, and the like. More infrequently, the interviewees’ acceptance was manifested in their willingness to share personal feelings about family, culture and/or Indian society in general. In turn, this helped me to establish further rapport with the interviewees.

4.4 Coding and Analysis

In this section, I will discuss coding and analysis as important means of organising and making sense of the data collected. The process of transcribing the data will be examined, and the results will be systematically analysed and elucidated.

Initially, the student data were translated into English from Hindi and Malayali, the preferred modes of communication among both Dalit and non-Dalit student participants. The use of these languages enabled them to share details of their personal experiences with greater ease and comfort. By contrast, the faculty members preferred to communicate in English, with intermittent interjections in either Hindi or Malayali. All of the interview sessions were transcribed and then thoroughly checked by constant reading and re-reading of the text, while simultaneously cross-checking the recorded data on my computer for any errors or omissions. This approach accommodated corrections and allowed the data to be categorised for further coding and analysis.

Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) explain coding as a “procedure for organising the text of the transcripts, and “discovering patterns” within the interview transcripts (p. 31). The data is usually broken down into “discrete parts, closely examined, and compared for similarities and differences” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 102). The coding process moves beyond concrete statements in the data “to making analytic interpretations” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 43), and assists in “identifying patterns” and “deriving and explaining categories” (Silverman, 2001, p. 65).

Each interview was coded in order to locate structures, patterns, differences and common themes. After listening to each interview recording, I scribbled down notes highlighting codes in the respective interview transcript. Next, I underscored common themes or issues that arose from the research participants’ transcripts (see Appendix F and Appendix G). This process of ‘raw coding’ was carried out on my computer using an advanced Microsoft Word feature to highlight short notes or themes in the left- and right-hand columns of the interview transcript. I then assigned colour codes to each interview transcript using the same Word programme (for format, see Appendix F and Appendix I). The different codes assigned by this method were then highlighted and placed under short sub-headings for further analysis (see sample of open coding in Appendix G and Appendix J).

Each participant’s interview transcript was coded separately, highlighting aspects of relevance to his or her unique experiences. All participants reported on their own experiences; however, some of the views they shared on education and society at large (including the government’s Quota policies and social discrimination) were similar. Each coded transcript drew upon, and was correlated with, earlier transcripts; this allowed for a more purposeful or focused coding (Charmaz, 2006), as common themes were grouped together. As Strauss and Corbin (1998) observe, “the fact that participants share common characteristics, or related meanings, enables their views to be grouped in an order” (p. 103). This systematic grouping is evident in all of the transcriptions (see the attached Appendices, F, G, I and J),

which were then split into distinct parts (Robson, 2002) to identify and assemble the views held in common by the participants in the study. Through careful reading and re-reading of the interview transcripts and field notes, I was able to test these statements against the data collected. All of the transcripts were analysed closely again, and any necessary corrections made. This process of open coding, which identified important perceptions held by the interviewees (Benford & Hunt, 1997), resulted in a model chart (see the Code Map presented at the end of this chapter) that enabled me to excavate further, crucial features of the interviews excerpted.

4.5 Ethical Issues

In this section, I will highlight the importance of taking an ethical approach to this research study, discussing the processes involved and shedding light on the potential ramifications of an exploratory study of this kind.

Rubin and Rubin (2005) believe that a researcher takes on an obligation to report data accurately and fairly, along with a commitment not to harm the interviewees (p. 34). An ethical approach involves moral obligations and “accountability throughout the research process” (Mauthner & Edwards, 2002, p. 14). This research study adheres to the guidelines set by the British Educational Research Association (BERA), and has received ethical approval from the King’s College London (RU) Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix A for letter of approval).

Consent forms were used to gain the respondents’ own permission to use their interviews in the research study (see Appendix C for consent form). Informed consent is a standard “feature of ethical procedure”; participants must be informed of the “nature and implications” of the research, and that participation is voluntary (Alldred & Gillies, 2002, p. 24). Sieber (1993) observes that “informed consent means communicating respectfully and openly with participants throughout the

project, respecting autonomy and life-style”, as well as being responsive to the participants’ perspectives and needs (p. 18).

The need for anonymity, both of the institution surveyed and the respondents’ names, was taken into consideration. To ensure anonymity, I created and utilised an information sheet and consent form (see Appendix B and Appendix C) which explains the participants’ right either to withdraw from or to participate in the research study. The form provided written guarantee of the confidentiality of information provided, the anonymity of both respondents and venue, the right to withdraw from the research study, and the commitment to erase all audio-recorded files upon completion of the thesis. Pseudonyms have been used to ensure the anonymity of both the university and the participants. Each participant was given a copy of the consent form for personal review and signature before taking part in the research study.

The consent forms were individually reviewed by the participants and signed as and where indicated, the “ethical implications” of this study having been made clear (Miller & Bell, 2002, p. 55). All of the participants – Dalit and non-Dalit, male and female – were provided with information about “what the research study entails”, as well as being allowed to exercise the choice of whether to “participate or not” (Miller & Bell, 2002, pp. 54-55). They were allowed to withdraw whenever they wished (see Appendix B and Appendix C). Participants who did sign the consent form were reassured verbally that the study would under no circumstances disclose their true identity, and were informed of the intent of the research, as explained in the consent letter (Warren, 2001). In this way, I ensured that the rights of the participants were respected, and that their privacy was neither “invaded” nor “exploited” (Burgess, 1989, p. 60; Sieber, 1993). Fulfilling these ethical obligations did not make it difficult for me to act responsibly towards the participants. Miller and Bell (2002) believe that “consent should be negotiated in an ongoing manner between the researcher and the researched throughout the research process” (p. 53).

During the recruitment phase, one Dalit student offered to take part in the study, but subsequently refrained from signing the consent form due to his position as the student representative of the Dalits at Shah Jahan. Miller and Bell (2002) note that such individuals “who identify themselves as socially excluded or belonging to a marginalized group, are unlikely to consent to writing signatures for the study” (p. 54). In a situation like this, “decisions taken around respondent access are closely bound up with concerns of ethics” (Miller & Bell, 2002, p. 55). In the light of this concern, McNamee (2002) insists that “there is a crucial need to respect the cultural mores of the community that researchers ought to acknowledge” (p. 6). It was thus made clear to the participants that they were allowed to exercise free choice as to whether or not to take part in the study, and that they had the option of changing or rephrasing their answers if they so wished.

4.5.1 Reflexivity

King and Horrocks (2010) claim that for “most qualitative researchers, reflexivity enables a critical stance to be taken towards the impact of both the researcher and the context in which the research takes place” (p. 126). The significance of self-awareness and reflexivity within the research study is widely acknowledged (Marshall and Young, 2006). Reflexivity plays a central role in the collection and analysis of data (Hammersley, 2008). As Robson (2002) observes, it involves “researchers reflecting upon their actions and values during research, and the effects that they may have” (p. 551). Reflexivity entails self-awareness and political/cultural consciousness, and requires an “ongoing assessment of what I know and how I know it” (Patton, 2002, p. 64). King and Horrocks (2010) offer a further elaboration: reflexivity “invites us to look ‘inwards’ and ‘outwards’, exploring the intersecting relationships between existing knowledge, our experience, research roles and the world around us” (p. 125). Reflexivity involves a constant awareness of the possible and actual outcome of the research on the people

and the settings under study (Gillham, 2000; Hammersley, 2008). Alvesson and Skoldberg (2009) identify two important features of such research: “careful interpretation” and “reflection”. Interpretation calls for “utmost awareness of [...] language and pre-understanding”, while “reflection” takes an inward-looking stance, addressing “the person of the researcher, the relevant research community [...] as well as the problematic nature of language and narrative [the form of presentation] in the research context” (p. 9).

Hammersley (2008) cautions that what an interviewee says may be driven by a “preoccupation with persuading others” rather than the simple desire to present facts about him/herself (Hammersley, 2008, pp. 90-91). The author believes that all interviews are susceptible to at “least some threats to validity” (Hammersley, 2008, p. 97). King and Horrocks (2010) claim that this kind of “exploration can be both illuminating and confusing, possibly threatening” (p. 125). Interviewees’ accounts are likely to be affected by error and bias; however, this does not mean that they are inaccurate, and if threats to validity do occur, we can draw on other sources to check the information provided (*ibid.*, p. 98). Hammersley (2008) poses some questions of relevance to the reflexivity issues raised by my research. These are as follows:

Are the respondents likely to be willing to tell us what they know? Even if they are able and willing to tell us in principle, will they need to reflect and deliberate to put their thoughts in order? Does this bring in a potential source of bias, does it introduce a screen of reflection between us as researchers and what do our informants know unreflectively that might be useful to us? (p. 99)

Davies (1999) poses a similar question:

How do you get people to elaborate on what they say? (p. 13)

Gillham (2000) adds that “what people believe and what they actually do” may be different things, “and to expect them to be the same is to misunderstand how people function” (p. 14).

Lichtman (2010) believes that “reflexivity is usually associated with a critical reflection on the practice and process of research and the role of the researcher” (p. 121). Alvesson and Skoldberg (2009) go further to define “reflection in the context of empirical research” as “interpretation of interpretation”; that is, “critical self-exploration of one’s own interpretations of empirical material” (p. 9). As a researcher, I addressed the interview findings through a critical lens (Davies, 1999; Atkinson & Coffey, 2003, p. 116), bearing in mind that the interviewees might at times prove uncertain, or else exercise caution by refusing to disclose matter of a sensitive nature. However, King and Horrocks (2010) believe that such uncertainty may in fact be “a good thing, opening up possibilities around additional, and often radically different, ways of seeing and comprehending people’s lives and experiences” (p. 125).

The need for sensitivity to the subject of study is fundamental at every stage of the interview process. It is impossible to eliminate the effects of the researcher on the researched; however, we can seek to lessen the former’s influence. Lichtman (2010), quoting Pillow (2003), believes that “reflexivity is recognition of the self [and] also recognition of the other (p. 122). The use of reflexive methods helps us to become conscious of how our behaviour may be influencing a situation, allowing us wherever possible to take steps to adjust our behaviour and thus control its effects. It is also important to bear in mind the position of power held by the researcher over the subjects of research, because the effect of the researcher’s presence is to some degree unavoidable. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) recommend that, during data analysis, researchers take into account the way(s) in which the research process and/or the researcher’s presence have, or could have, shaped or affected the data. Hammersley (2008) believes that “suspicion in the

sense of heightened level of methodological caution, rather than sustained epistemological doubt, is therefore always required” (p. 99).

Hammersley (2008) and Rubin and Rubin (2005) insist that, among other factors, close examination of the interview dynamics, careful selection of samples, thorough recording of data, questioning of interviews, and continuous evaluation are all necessary to ensure that the information shared during the interview is sufficiently accurate. In Alvesson and Skoldberg’s (2009) words, “we must proceed with care and reflection, pondering a good deal [on] why we make just these particular interpretations, before forming any opinions of ‘reality’” (p. 10). Throughout the interview process, I reflected upon the participants’ experiences in an attempt to identify possible areas of bias in their responses. During interviews with the faculty members, for example, I felt at certain points that the interviewees were telling the truth about their personal experiences, especially regarding caste-biased attitudes and wider social concerns. However, certain interview questions were met with greater hesitancy or trepidation. Dalit female members of the faculty showed particular caution as to what they shared of the politics of faculty management and administration, as well as certain challenges they had themselves encountered. Such details, they felt, were not appropriate or perhaps safe to disclose, given their ‘minority’ position within the department. Some Dalit male faculty members were reluctant to answer questions on government policy (namely the Quota policy) and politics (the government’s role in reproducing caste bias).

Hammersley (2008) is of the opinion that a researcher should take a sceptical attitude towards the information provided in interviews. With Hammersley’s warning in mind, my research study may be subject to pitfalls, as its qualitative approach allows room for bias (relating to class, gender, caste, etc.) and value judgements to influence participants’ responses. The interaction between the researcher and interviewee allows for the possibility of mutual influence, requiring the interviewer to be “constantly self-aware”, and to probe his/her own

“predispositions and expectations” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 30). Lichtman (2010) states that researchers should involve themselves in the research study in visible ways, starting with the “process of self-disclosure and its impact on knowledge production during the research encounter” (p. 123). Lichtman (2010) quotes Reinharz (1992), who believes that a researcher’s self-disclosure “in a way maximises engagement of the self but also increases the researcher’s vulnerability to criticism” (pp. 122-123). Nonetheless, Lichtman (2010) claims that “there needs to be a place in research for somatic and emotive ways of knowing in the construction of knowledge” (p. 123). In the case of the present study, it was important for me (as an explorative interviewer) not only to gain an understanding of the Dalit respondents’ experiences, but also to share some elements of my own background. It was, moreover, vital for me to take into account their culture, ethnicity and language (Jogdand, 2007).

4.5.2 Positionality

Speaking of positionality, Wenger (2001) believes that the researcher should be aware of the “implications and values” of a nation’s culture (p. 274). A researcher’s lack of understanding of social status, culture, ethnicity or language could be perceived as “insensitive and inappropriate” by the participants of the study (Wenger, 2001, p. 274). My own position as both a researcher and an outsider to the Dalit community may well have limited the research process.

It is common, but of course not necessary, for researchers using qualitative methodologies to study a group, organisation, or culture they belong to, and in doing so, they begin the research process as an insider or ‘native’ (Bonner & Tolhurst, 2002; Hewitt-Taylor, 2002; Kanuha, 2000). Bonner and Tolhurst (2002) outlined three key advantages of being an insider to the research domain: a better understanding of the group’s culture; the ability to interact well with the group and

its members; and a previously established, and therefore greater, relational intimacy with the group.

Researchers, particularly those using qualitative methodologies, often position themselves as ‘insiders’ rather than ‘outsiders’ to their research domain. Insider-researchers are often intimately connected to their research domains, and would rarely be described as those who “parachute into people’s lives... and then vanish” (Gerard, 1995, p. 59). However, my position in this research could neither be described as ‘inside’ nor ‘outside’ the research domain. In many ways my experience ‘in the middle’ influenced my choice of research topic, the scope of my study, access to informants, the collection and analysis of data, and the maintenance of research rigor.

Gerard (1995) is of the view that “generally, insider-researchers are those who chose to study a group (Dalit) to which they belong, while outsider researchers do not belong to the group under study (Dalit)” (p. 60). Although, I do not hold any affiliation to the Dalit community, to some extent, I could be considered as an “insider-researcher” – for having been schooled in India, for speaking both the common Indian national language (Hindi) and regional language (Malayali- also spoken by the Dalits); and most importantly, for being a part of the Indian culture and its heritage. However, as an “outside researcher” ethnically I am considered to be a mixed-race person (i.e. Indo-Iranian), born in Iran and representing a different religious belief system (i.e., Christianity), studying at an ‘outside’ university (King’s College London), and most notably, for not being part of the Dalit community, or having a personal experience of their culture or practiced religious belief system.

Personal inhibitions, over-generalisations and/or a one-sided understanding of the Dalits’ experiences could have compromised the information I gathered. I understood the effect that my positionality – in terms of gender, class, ethnicity,

culture, religion, age, etc. – might have on the development of the research, and on writing my thesis. To counter this influence, I kept in mind the views of Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000), who advise the researcher to ensure that the “gender, class, cultural, social, and political context of the researcher does not affect interaction in ways that lead to difficult situations for the participant involved” (p. 245). DeLiege (1997) claims that, in order to assess an individual’s world-view, it is imperative to understand the religion, language, culture, traditional values and customs that govern the region or state in which they reside. Pais (2007) agrees: it is important to gain an understanding of the development and function of a nation’s history, culture, class or caste hierarchy, norms, etc., in order to yield research outcomes that take into account the nation’s various forms and manners of development.

Along with my careful attention to India’s cultural environment, as well as to the ethical obligations of the research study, it was also necessary for me, as a researcher, to be cautious about exhibiting ‘personal power’, especially in terms of how I presented the participants in the research study. The researcher has the power to characterise the participant in various, potentially contradictory ways. Such ambiguities may also lie in the complexity of a participant’s identity, which is itself often varied and paradoxical (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Through the processes of coding and analysing the data, it became obvious that each interview account was susceptible to different interpretations capable of distorting the participant’s actual experiences and thereby leading to a skewed depiction of who they are or what they have experienced in their lives.

My aim as a researcher was to be cautious, and to avoid allowing any of my own cultural assumptions to prevent me from paying attention to the views shared by the interviewees (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). To achieve my goal of determining as accurately as possible what the Dalit and non-Dalit interviewees “have seen, heard or experienced” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 37), I decided to use self-reflection as a way of examining my shortfalls or biases, and ensuring my full commitment as a

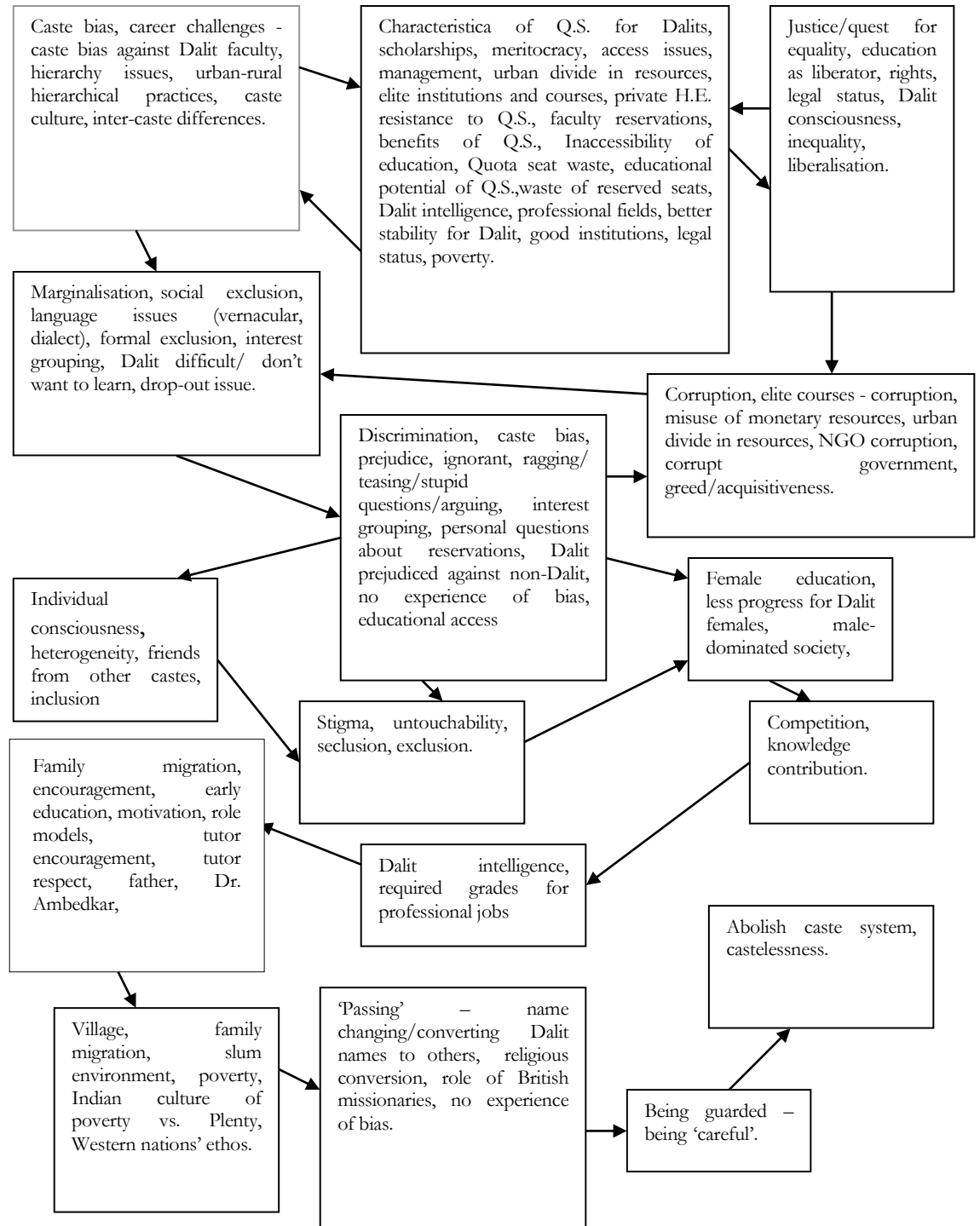
researcher, recognising that participants in this study were free to speak openly and freely, with no (or few) interruptions. Flexibility, adaptability, cultural sensitivity and my ability to listen carefully to the participants ensured that the relationship between interviewer and interviewee was positioned comfortably. At some points, I cautioned myself or ceased to pursue a line of enquiry because I felt that the interviewee did not want to disclose certain details due to fear, unease or sadness. For example, one Dalit female participant expressed concern and discontent as to how people viewed her caste identity. She shared, with caution, the problems she faced as a female within her own family and as a Dalit female in Indian society as a whole. Acknowledging the unease apparent in her body language and tone of voice, I cautioned myself against pursuing this particular topic, suppressing my ulterior motivation to gather more information of use to my research analysis.

4.6 Summary

This chapter has outlined and described the methodological processes involved in the present study. While this approach may be subject to limitations, it appears to be the most suitable means by which to accomplish my research aims and objectives. The chosen qualitative method gave me the opportunity to gain a variety of insights into the personal experiences of the Dalit participants during each interview session. I demonstrated caution on the basis of cultural concerns in both the collection of data and its analysis. The translated versions of the transcripts were carefully read and analysed thoroughly by myself. Copies of the translated versions were shared and discussed with the interviewees, checking for any errors in translation, or misinterpretations of the statements made by them for this study. The research method upholds obligations of cultural sensitivity, drawing in particular on sources that offer a structured approach to the study of an already vulnerable minority in Indian society. Efforts were made to understand the complexity of the participants' backgrounds and caste/class affiliation, and ethical accountability was maintained

in guarding their true identities. I turn now to the first chapter of data analysis, which offers further details of the Dalit participants' experiences as recorded in the interview sessions.

Code Map: List of Key Codes from Interview Transcripts and Field Notes



Chapter 5

Faculty Voices: The Role of the Quota System, Caste Power and Discrimination

“ There are two sources of information available on the Dalit people. One is in written form, available in libraries; and the other is ‘hidden’ in the mind of each Dalit individual. I believe that their minds need to be excavated in order to understand the issues Dalit face in today’s society.” (Professor Singh, a Dalit)

5. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the experiences of Dalit faculty members at Shah Jahan University. It will also take into account the views of a small number of non-Dalit faculty members (that is, two such respondents) on Dalit access to academia, the role of the Quota System, and the challenges faced by Dalit faculty members within the university environment. In so doing, it will address the following research questions:

- What kinds of (caste-influenced) experiences have shaped or affected Dalit faculty members in their access to, and progression within, the University of Shah Jahan?
- What is the role of the government’s Quota System policy in helping the Dalit to gain access to higher education?

The chapter draws on interviews with 8 faculty members (see Table 1) to explore their experiences at one of India’s premier universities. Initially, a total of 11

faculty members (9 Dalits and 2 non-Dalits) were interviewed; however, this chapter makes use of the responses of 8 faculty members (4 Dalit males, 2 Dalit females, and 2 non-Dalit males), as these most clearly illustrate the main coded themes. The interview excerpts selected for this chapter are taken from semi-structured interviews with both Dalit and non-Dalit respondents, contextualising their varying personal experiences in Shah Jahan, as well as their perceptions and experiences of the Quota System.

While conducting these interviews, a disparity became apparent between the experiences of Dalit and non-Dalit academic staff in terms of professional advancement and respect received from colleagues and students. Although the Dalit interviewees were as experienced and as well qualified as their non-Dalit counterparts, they tended to have less administrative control and to hold positions of less authority within the university. In addition, they reported facing subtle discrimination not only from their non-Dalit colleagues, but also their students.

This chapter is structured around three key themes that have emerged from systematic data coding and analysis, as follows:

- **The Quota System in higher education** – the enactment of the Quota System policy, its strengths and limitations, and the problem of merit.
- **Power, dominance and corruption** – exploitation of caste power in higher education; issues of dominance, bias and control, and the problems of corruption.
- **Discrimination** – growing concerns about caste-based prejudice and injustice; academic relationships and rapport between Dalit and non-Dalit faculty; the link between gender and discrimination as illustrated by the experiences of Dalit female faculty; the prejudice displayed by non-Dalit students; and means of coping with discriminatory attitudes.

In view of these three key emergent themes, the chapter will argue that caste-based manipulation all too frequently goes unrecognised. With reference to the respondents' direct experiences of academia, this chapter illuminates some of the challenges faced on a daily basis by Dalit faculty members who have benefited from the Quota System, and explores the ways in which caste disposition affects the lives and career prospects of Dalit academics, both in a departmental setting and in the university at large.

Table 1: University faculty members interviewed

Name (pseudonym)	University department and subject status	Dalit/non-Dalit; male/female
1) Professor Kapoor	Professor in the Department of Political Science (<i>low-status arts subject</i>)	Dalit male
2) Professor Singh	Professor in the Department of Sociology (<i>low-status arts subject</i>)	Dalit male
3) Dr. Lal	Lecturer in the Department of History (<i>low-status arts subject</i>)	Dalit male
4) Dr. Khanna	Senior Lecturer in the Department of Law (<i>medium-status subject</i>)	Dalit male
5) Dr. Srivastav	Lecturer in the Department of Chemistry (<i>high-status Science subject</i>)	Dalit female
6) Dr. Mandeep	Associate Lecturer in the Department of Psychology (<i>low-status social science subject</i>)	Dalit female
7) Professor Rai	Professor in the Department of Management Studies (<i>high-status subject</i>)	Non-Dalit male
8) Professor Bhatia	Professor in the Department of Economics (<i>medium-status social science subject</i>)	Non-Dalit male

Before addressing the research questions, it is necessary to describe the caste positioning of the Dalit faculty members listed in Table 1. The individuals whose responses are discussed in this chapter all now belong to the ‘creamy layer’ (Jenkins, 2003; Rana, 2008) of the Dalit caste, all having resided in cities, and all

with higher education qualifications. Professor Kapoor and Professor Singh, both of whom hold senior professorial positions (although in low-status subjects), are the oldest of the Dalit faculty interviewed for this study. Both professors hail from rural village backgrounds, and were educated in small-town government district schools. As young adolescents, they migrated to the city with their families. Having spent their college and university years in a large city, they were subsequently recipients of the Quota scholarships offered in the 1970s, which assisted them financially to attain Master's and doctoral qualifications. Dr. Lal, Dr. Khanna, Dr. Srivastav and Dr. Mandeep are among the younger Dalit individuals sampled here; they were raised and educated in the city, and hold senior positions at the University of Shah Jahan. Professor Rai and Professor Bhatia are upper-caste non-Dalit, also raised and educated in the city, who hold senior professorships in their respective departments at the university.

5.1 Accounting for Dalit Experiences

In the first chapter of this study, I discussed the caste system and highlighted some of the key findings concerning the influence of caste on education in Indian society. This section will briefly recapitulate the socio-cultural influence of the caste system on the Indian higher educational system. The objective is to understand how caste affects institutions of learning, and to identify the changing trends in caste culture that influence the process of staff and student selection.

The caste structure operates at two levels in modern, secular educational institutions in India. At a structural level, the educational structure is interpolated by the caste system from higher management down to an administrative/clerical level. Upper-caste individuals hold positions of power in the educational hierarchy (Gnanaraj & Krishnamurthy, 2000). Many such individuals have used this authority to deploy policies that discriminate against Dalit applicants and deter them from pursuing

higher education, while at the same time favouring the acceptance of non-Dalit students to learning institutions. For example, the rules and regulations governing Brahmin (high-caste) colleges in India, as well as their processes of student recruitment, are determined by the headteacher of each college in collaboration with a high-level management committee (Verma & Singh, 2005). India's caste hegemony has for centuries failed to "mandate education to Dalit due to traditional caste status symbols" (Sheth, 2004, p. 165). Instead, it has upheld the inherited 'right' of non-Dalit individuals to access education ahead of their Dalit peers.

By and large, this also affects the role of the Quota policy, since, as Jogdand (2007) claims, "management play various tricks in order not to fill the reserved seats" (p. 163), and to avoid applying the Quota policy. The admissions selection process offers a further opportunity to circumvent Quota reservations. Here, the educational structure itself becomes a selection ground – through, for example, the streaming of students and staff. Education functions as an agent of both selection and socialisation (Michael, 2007). DeLiege (1997) argues that it is to some degree inevitable that the caste system influences not only the selection of staff and students, the appointment of the members of managing committees, and the allocation of privileges, but also the processes of teaching and learning, which play a crucial part in securing the continuity of both traditional and modern values.

5.2 Dalit Faculty Members' Experiences of the Quota System in Higher Education

This section examines Dalit faculty members' experiences of the Quota policies in terms of attaining higher educational degrees, and explores the ongoing debate on these policies as reflected in the participants' responses.

5.2.1 The Implementation of the Quota System Policy: Strengths

Due to concerns about equity in educational attainment, the Quota policies for higher education were legislated by India's central and provincial governments (Mishra, 2001). Arguably, these policies broadened the opportunity for Dalit social mobility by providing additional access to higher education (Mishra, 2001; Pais, 2007). The Quota seats reserved for Dalit students within higher educational institutions and professional colleges "promised a better future" (Panini, 1996, p. 57). Together with other societal amendments, the benefits of the Quota System are acknowledged to have produced "some social mobility among many Dalit communities" (Froystad, 2005, p. 119). In spite of its limitations, the policy has certainly brought about some improvements. Individual mobility is one such positive outcome. Most of the faculty members interviewed in this study were recipients of scholarships provided through the Quota System in the early 1970s. The older Dalit faculty participants (Professor Kapoor and Professor Singh) share an under-privileged family background. Professor Kapoor describes his connection with the Quota policies as follows:

As my family was poor, I benefited from subsidised school fees. By means of scholarships I was able to achieve higher degrees. At this point, the Quota System was greatly of use in furthering my education. During the seventies, there was an increased impetus to provide scholarships for the Dalit people, in the wake of issues that had recently come to the attention of the government. (Interview - 17/07/09)

With a widespread lack of support for Dalit educational attainment prior to the inception of the Quota System, Professor Kapoor reports that constitutional safeguards were necessary to support and develop Dalit rights to educational access. During the 1970s, in particular, the government aimed to increase Dalits' access to education in order to set them on the path of progress along with the rest

of Indian society (Paswan, 2003; Chatterjee, 2004). For the impoverished and vulnerable Dalit people, the Quota scholarship measures contributed to a sense that higher education was for the first time accessible, if not guaranteed. The scholarship aid provided by the government during the 1970s certainly generated a more favourable situation for the Dalit. As explained in Chapter 2, Dalit educational mobility received increased governmental support at this time, with the provision of scholarships that promoted higher levels of educational access and participation for the Dalit, especially in urban centres. Speaking of his Quota scholarship, Professor Singh remarked:

I was able to acquire it at the outset of my studies, during the early seventies. Scholarships were relatively attainable, but only for Dalits residing in the city. (Interview – 24/07/09)

Similarly, Dr. Lal reports that:

I acquired a scholarship through the Quota System in the seventies [...] a time when [...] I would say a reasonable amount [of scholarships] were available to Dalit students in this city. So, through this scholarship I was able to earn a Master's degree, and after a few years or so, I secured a Ph.D. (Interview – 03/09/09)

Reddy *et al.* (2004) state that admitting Dalit students to different programmes of study was “novel to the history of higher education in the country” (p. 119). The scholarships provided by the Quota System took into consideration the socio-economic backgrounds of individual Dalit. However, it is important to note that the Quota scholarship scheme had strict, standardised criteria for eligibility. It was not easy for a Dalit candidate to secure Quota funding. Dr. Lal made the following observation in interview:

One had to perform really well to acquire it. I believe that you then had to prove to the management and administration that you were worthy of the scholarship they had given you. (Interview – 03/09/09)

In Dr. Lal's view, the attainment of a Quota scholarship in the 1970s relied heavily on merit. University admissions bodies sought out high-performing Dalit students who would meet the Quota scholarship requirements. In short, therefore, the scheme served its purpose in providing Dalit applicants with a more equitable playing field (Reddy *et al.*, 2004). Indeed, Professor Rai (a non-Dalit) is of the view that the Quota System has significantly benefited the Dalit population. He said:

Compared to the sixties, the fifties and even earlier, the condition of the Dalit has greatly improved. I mean [...] today Dalit have attained good positions [...] which quite frankly would not have been possible without Quota reservations. They have reaped the benefits of the Quota reservations provided by the government. (Interview – 28/08/09)

Professor Rai recognises the contribution of the Quota System to improving the position of Dalit communities. He underscores the economic and social advantages they have gained as a result of the Quota reservations. In his view, the benefits and compensation provided by the Quota System have advanced Dalit social mobility (Mehta & Pantham, 2006). Professor Bhatia (a non-Dalit) shared a similar view, though perhaps with a more nuanced approach towards inclusion:

Many Dalit have benefited from the Quota System's higher education scholarships, and have earned themselves access to reputable positions. However, although I support the right of the Dalit to education, I also feel that the Quota System is setting worthy, under-privileged non-Dalit at a disadvantage. What I mean to say is [...] there are poor non-Dalit who should merit equal scholarships too [...]. Maybe the government should

provide additional seats for poor non-Dalit in higher education. Why is this opportunity not available to disadvantaged non-Dalit applicants? [...] why only Dalit? If we are to pursue equality for all, the government should provide Quota scholarships for poor Dalit and non-Dalit applicants alike. (Interview – 18/09/09)

The Quota policies raise wider questions about social justice. As Gupta (2006) observes, the “issue of Quota reservations has generated a polarised debate” (p. 2). The Quota policy has secured some level of educational opportunity for the Dalit. Yet non-Dalit who oppose the scheme often question its integrity in failing to provide equal access on a national scale (Gupta, 2006). They argue that individual merit is ignored in the name of social justice, resulting in some unjust treatment of “the meritorious” (Hooda, 2002, p. 16).

It is important to note that the Quota reservations (as detailed in Chapter 2) have consistently aided the Dalit in gaining access to higher education since the inception of the Quota policy in the 1950s. However, Indian society has also witnessed the emergence and rise of ‘creamy-layer’ Dalit (Jenkins, 2003; Rana, 2008; and see Chapter 8), who continue to benefit from Quota seats despite their financial and social privileges. For non-Dalits, this is a telling instance of the inherently flawed nature of the government’s scholarship policies (Chandra, 2004). Professor Bhatia makes a valid point: the special provisions made for some Dalit in the form of Quota seats are considered a source of inequality and discrimination against deserving but impoverished non-Dalit individuals.

It should be noted, however, that India’s traditional caste hierarchy has denied educational development and socio-economic opportunities to the Dalit for centuries. Dr. Lal described a specific structural form of exclusion:

Only 67 Dalit academics are members of university departments at Shah Jahan. These include professors, lecturers, assistant lecturers, researchers and readers in the various departments within the fields of Arts/Humanities, Social Sciences, Sciences, Medicine, Engineering, Law, Business Management, and Technology. As few as 7% of the 15% seats allocated for Quota students [8% for Scheduled Castes and 7% for Scheduled Tribes] – less than half of the Quota reservations – are used to employ university staff and faculty. (Interview - 10/07/10)

Here, Dr. Lal points out that very few Dalit faculty members are recruited to universities, in spite of the Quota reservations. He describes the reality of the situation at the University of Shah Jahan – whose authorities are not abiding by the government's Quota policy, but instead continue to mishandle the Quota allotment established for Dalit development. However, the non-Dalit Professor Bhatia argued as follows:

The presence of Dalit faculty in this university is evidence enough that the government is not as careless as it is often argued to be, and has not neglected their [the Dalits'] cause. On the contrary, the Quota reservations have directly assisted Dalit in securing teaching positions in this university [...] I do acknowledge that they are fewer in number, but [...] in comparison to previous years I think their access to teaching positions today reflects the positive steps taken by the government in implementing the Quota System. (Interview – 18/09/09)

In Professor Bhatia's opinion, there is no doubt that the policy has helped the Dalit to gain access to university learning. Government schemes have broadened the range and possibility of Dalit social mobility in higher education (Pais, 2007). Thorat (2009) concurs: "the effectiveness of the Quota has empowered Dalit" (p. 85). However, the figures provided by Dr. Lal tell a different story, illustrating the

paucity of Dalit in academic positions despite the official 15% allocation of university seats. Certainly, there seem to be major inconsistencies in Shah Jahan's recruitment of Dalit faculty. Professor Bhatia, a non-Dalit, reports that the Dalit presence in the university's departments, while much smaller than the non-Dalit contingent, is considerably greater than in previous years. However, this invites the question of whether Dalit faculty are recruited into university departments for the purpose of deflecting allegations of prejudice and caste bias against the Dalit.

One could argue that the majority (non-Dalit) assists the minority (Dalit) by offering them educational advantages (Rajawat, 2004). In other words, the institution (in this case, the university) may present its selection process as impartial and secular if it adheres closely to the requirements set by the Quota System. It aims thereby to be viewed as providing equal opportunities for Dalit and non-Dalit individuals. However, Rana (2008) argues that in a "caste-ridden society, the achievement of social equality requires that policies of equal opportunity must concentrate on the equality of Dalit" (p. 349). This, in Dr. Lal's view, is far from the case in the University of Shah Jahan.

Moreover, Dr. Khanna observed in interview that:

Non-Dalit of higher castes have reaped the privileges of education without any opposition, unlike Dalit who have suffered a largely unprivileged lifestyle. The Quota System gave the Dalit an opportunity to succeed in life [...] allowing Dalit to access formal education which had been denied to them before the inception of the system. I feel that the Quota policy should continue, because there are many more hard-working Dalit who wish to further their education but lack access to universities. And let me add, frankly [...] Quota seats in higher education today stand contested [...] and why is that? [...] because the upper management and committee come from upper-caste groups, and do almost everything in their power to preserve

their privileges [...] and I believe they contravene the government's Quota regulations by inhibiting the selection of Dalit faculty. (Interview – 13/08/08)

Omvedt (2006) claims that “the present rule is essentially a continuation of the old Hindu feudalism which kept the Dalit deprived of their social privileges” (p. 72). In Dr. Khanna's opinion, the cultural oppression of the caste system maintains a hierarchical distinction between superior and inferior, deserving and undeserving, which is perpetuated in the realm of higher education (Gupta, 2006; Omvedt, 2006). Dr. Khanna and Dr. Lal view the caste system as sedimented within higher education. In both cases, their experiences reflect one of the many facets of caste oppression pervasive in the high-caste echelons of university management, which seek to resist the Quota benefits designed to promote Dalit access to universities. Moreover, in recent years there has been a conspicuous lack of government initiatives to curb this oppression. The implementation of the Quota legislation has become increasingly lax.

5.2.2 Quota Reservation Policy: Limitations

The Quota policy continues to face criticism. Studies by Mishra (2001), Chalam (2007) and Jogdand (2007) show that most Quota seats are taken up by well-off Dalit. Currently, the main recipients of the Quota scholarships are not poor rural Dalit – known as ‘Quota’ Dalit – from smaller and more marginal states and towns in India, but economically affluent Dalit from urban centres, including those who belong to the ‘creamy layer’ (Jenkins, 2003; Rana, 2008; and see Chapter 8).

Dr. Khanna made the following remarks:

Although the Constitution has accorded it [the Quota policy], only a few benefit from it. Rural people do not get the benefits. Many Dalit in rural sectors are financially challenged as compared to urban city Dalits [...] In fact, the Quota scholarships were in theory provided on behalf of all Dalit communities [...] I mean any Dalit from any place in India [...] [H]owever, a large proportion [of the scholarships] is accessed by Dalit from the cities. (Interview – 13/08/09)

It should be noted that, in terms of the choice of higher education, every individual must acquire the baseline qualifications required to gain entry to universities (B.A., B.Sc, etc. for faculty appointments). This in itself is a major obstacle to the poorer rural members of the Dalit community. The absence of effective measures to monitor and manage the implementation of the Quota policy has made many of its benefits unavailable to rural Dalit in greater need. One of the major problems faced by Dalit communities is poverty, which is a key factor in their educational exclusion (Yadav, 2005). Paswan (2003) believes that a “lack of educational ownership and social discrimination” are the main reasons for the continuing under-representation and exclusion of the poorer rural Dalit in higher education in India (p. 134).

Although the Quota educational policy was originally implemented to ensure a fairer distribution of resources, and to protect the rights and welfare of the Dalits, the policy soon turned out to be less successful than hoped, producing a privileged class of urban Dalits with potentially vested interests in maintaining a certain degree of inequality. Urban Dalits with secure economic backgrounds were well placed to obtain Quota seats simply through their caste affiliation, regardless of their financial privileges (Paswan, 2003). Coupled with the consistent failure of the government and educational institutions to obtain background information (such as that relating to the socio-economic status of urban Dalit), this has often meant that fewer seats are available to economically disadvantaged Dalit individuals. The

result has been to worsen the divide (further detailed in Chapter 8) between ‘Quota’ and ‘creamy-layer’ Dalits (Paswan, 2003).

Undeniably, discrimination against Dalit – particularly those from rural regions – persists in Indian society. Instead, city-dwelling Dalit reap the benefits of the policy, obtaining a greater number of Quota seats in higher education. Dr. Lal commented:

Reservations have had a positive impact and continue to do so for those Dalit who are able to access them, especially urban Dalit. However, non-Dalit view the Quota policy reservation as problematic. (Interview – 03/09/09)

As Dr. Lal intimates here, the scholarships provided by the Quota System have come to be “hotly politicised or even condemned by certain quarters of the Dalit and non-Dalit group” (Das, 2004, p. 124). Dr. Lal believes that non-Dalit with caste-biased attitudes have a tendency to marginalise Dalit individuals. In particular, non-Dalits’ shrewd use of the concept of merit – highly resonant in today’s competitive society – has engendered considerable dispute about the mobility of Dalit individuals (Mitra, 1994; Hooda, 2002). This will be discussed in the following section.

5.2.3 Problems Associated With Merit

Paswan (2002) argues that “merit has no fixed definition [...] its criterion is to achieve some pre-determined social objective or value, or to satisfy certain perceived social needs” (p. 160). Rana (2008) states that “unfortunately in India all criteria measuring a person’s merit are centred on his performance in the

examination” (p. 137). Verdugo (2003) claims that in higher education today, the “dominant ideology suggests that ‘individual merit’ drives one’s status position” (p. 241). As discussed in Chapter 2, Amman (2008) regards “merit as achievement” (p. 356) as one of the key criteria for entry to prestigious and powerful positions. However, Pinto (2008) argues that in the Indian context, merit has become an “alibi” for preserving the “Brahminical – upper-caste – status quo”, which restricts access to and control over knowledge and institutions to a privileged minority (p. 77).

Although the Quota scholarship policies have resulted in increased access to higher education for some Dalits, non-Dalit frequently co-opt the notion of ‘merit’ to oppose the provision of university places to Dalit individuals (Pinto, 2008). Professor Rai (a non-Dalit) shared his views on this matter, as follows:

I have some doubts about Quota reservation policies in elite universities today. Despite the progress made by the Dalit, I think the importance of merit in a competitive society like ours, is compromised on a lot of levels. I mean [...] I’ve worked hard academically to achieve what I have today, and I believe that the same can be said of other individuals with high aspirations, no matter what class, caste or religion they come from. So, in a sense, the Quota policy hinders the deserving by allowing mediocre individuals access to scholarships and teaching positions. (Interview – 21/08/09)

Anti-reservationists believe that the Quota policy opposes the principle of equal opportunities preserved in the Indian Constitution (Hooda, 2002). They argue that individual merit is displaced in the name of social justice, resulting in injustice to more deserving individuals. Professor Rai, for instance, opposes the Quota policy insofar as he perceives it to promote Dalit access to the detriment of non-Dalit individuals “with high aspirations” in the realm of academia. His critique of the

system is egalitarian: he believes that equal opportunities should be afforded uniformly to all individuals, not just Dalits.

Professor Rai seems to suggest that Dalit faculty members owe their success within the higher educational setting to the Quota System, rather than to personal achievement. Amman (2008) believes that the notion of merit magnifies the qualities of those who are selected. He argues that selection based on merit renders the “disparity notion as normal and legitimates those who are selected as the ‘rightful’ and ‘just’ occupiers of special positions” (p. 359). One might argue, therefore, that a merit-based admissions policy demands the inclusion of worthy non-Dalit candidates as equally eligible for higher education. In a meritocratic system, merit and achievement count most highly.

Professor Rai’s description of Dalit faculty members as ‘mediocre’ may reflect a belief that Dalits are not ‘fit’ to be part of the faculty at Shah Jahan. Such a belief, however, fails to reflect reality. For example, every faculty member – Dalit and non-Dalit – is required to hold a doctoral degree in order to teach postgraduate students at Shah Jahan. Although Dalit faculty members may not be as highly qualified as their non-Dalit counterparts – they may not hold additional academic degrees, for example, or have the same amount of teaching experience – it is important to note that the Dalits have benefited from few, if any, of the social and economic privileges afforded to those of higher castes (Pais, 2007). The allegation of mediocrity made by Professor Rai, therefore, is merely a rhetorical means of marginalising the Dalit and evading the need to deal with the exclusion and prejudice they face on a day-to-day basis (Jogdand, 2007; D’ Souza, 2009).

Professor Bhatia, another non-Dalit, was firm in his support of a connection between the Quota System and mediocrity in universities:

I think that the Quota policy has, since its inception, afforded access to many Dalit across many states and universities. However, I believe that Quota reservations should no longer be applicable to high-status institutions, especially faculty bodies. What I mean [...] is that [...] more suitable candidates for university places or faculty positions will increase the efficiency and importance of the department. (Interview – 18/09/09)

Paswan (2002) suggests that “supporters of the merit principle claim that it assures best justice [...] insofar as it supports the selection of the ablest persons” for higher educational attainment (p. 160). Rather akin to Professor Rai’s valorisation of merit over mediocrity, Professor Bhatia criticised the Quota System for de-prioritising individual merit, which he believes endangers the opportunities of other, non-Dalit individuals. While Professor Bhatia’s views on the Quota policy’s failings may well resemble those held by Professor Rai, the former was more vociferous in advocating the eradication of the system in elite universities, on the grounds that it lowers the educational standards of these prestigious institutions. Professor Bhatia was keenly aware of the challenges posed by the policy to meritorious non-Dalit students; however, he utterly failed to consider the social and economic disadvantages that the Dalit must daily strive to overcome.

Professor Kapoor (a Dalit) challenged the views of his non-Dalit peers:

Non-Dalit individuals fail to understand the educational background of the Dalit. I grew up in a low-income family home. I received good grades from a mediocre government school. I was fortunate enough to benefit from the Quota System in gaining access to university education, which quite [...] frankly enabled me to reach the position I’m in today. It is much easier for non-Dalit educated at good grammar schools to access good universities. Their opportunities are abundant [...] I mean they don’t also have to deal with the problems that come with being of the Dalit caste. Their caste

automatically promotes them to privileged positions in our society. You see what I mean [...] that is why I think the Quota System should remain, because there are many more like me who need to survive and move up our unfortunate caste hierarchy. (Interview – 17/07/09)

Paswan (2002) believes that Dalit face the serious threat of social immobility “because certain castes, classes or groups dominate every walk of life”, leaving “no place or hope for the lowest [Dalit] caste and classes, and [restricting] their mobility’ (p. 163). The educational opportunities and resources provided by the Quota policy for Dalit communities frequently fail to prevent the social and educational ‘stagnation’ of the Dalit (Shah, 2002). Additionally, Omvedt (2006) believes, the widespread attitude of discrimination further fuels the marginalisation of the Dalit, allowing “high-caste [non-Dalits] to wield power, dominance, control” and thereby to uphold their ‘right’ to social privileges (p. 72).

5.3 Power, Dominance and Corruption

This section aims to explore the complex experiences of Dalit faculty at the University of Shah Jahan, with a particular focus on the challenges relating to power, domination, control and corruption, and their influence on the everyday functioning of Shah Jahan’s administration, management and faculty bodies.

5.3.1 Brief Overview of Caste Power in Higher Education

Kaplan (2006) claims that “power has the ability to influence events [...] and represents the ability to use political capital to get what one wants” (p. 268). Freire (1985) believes that “culture is linked to power and to the imposition of a specific

set of ruling-class codes and experiences [...] and confirms privileged students from the dominant classes while excluding and discrediting histories, experiences, and dreams of subordinate groups” (p. 15). As documented earlier (in Chapter 1), education in pre-colonial India had a religious content which often advised against the education of lower castes. Caste, race and ethnic stratification, as Berreman (1972) observes, are all “systems of social separation and cultural heterogeneity”, upheld and preserved by dominant economic and political institutions that prioritise personal rights based on “religious tenets” rather than social approval or agreement (p. 400). The intrinsic authority of the caste system lies, in Sivalingum’s (1999) words, in its “devious manipulation [...] of Hindu religious texts”, under whose authority high-caste non-Dalit have acquired, unopposed, the social privileges of power and control (p. 121). Nigavekar (2005) believes that the challenges facing the system of higher education in India “cannot be met without a total overhaul of the structure of management of higher education institutions” (p. 7).

India’s caste culture has thus provided religious ‘sanction’ for the control of education by upper-caste elites. As Gnanaraj and Krishnamurthy (2000) observe, those who dominate the caste hierarchy often take “control of the faculties of education and research” (p. 61). Their dominance over the lower castes is, moreover, self-perpetuating, as the process of education produces and reproduces the traditional or prevailing systems of social control (Mishra, 1989; Singh, 2002). Historically, those at the top of the caste hierarchy have gained easy access to education, bureaucratic control and political power (Chalam, 2007). Mohanty (1999) highlights the impact of “caste on the internal affairs of the educational institutions [...] and factors like money, power, manipulation, political linkage and government leaders in power maintenance” (p. 122).

5.3.2 Issues of Dominance and Control

In this section, emphasis is placed on the issues of dominance and control within the educational realm. The interview extracts are used to highlight caste dominance, with especial focus on the forms of cultural hegemony (in this case, upper castes ruling over lower castes) at work within the higher educational setting.

Baez and Slaughter (2001) claim that “institutions [of higher education] ensure domination by promoting the norms and values of the dominant class” or caste (p. 75). Furthermore, the authors emphasise that within the structures of “hegemony within higher education institutions, faculty usually play crucial roles in resistance practices and compete for dominance” (p. 76). In India, the upper castes (Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya; in other words, non-Dalit castes) continue to gain in a sustained way from the privileges of caste, and retain, therefore, a vested interest in its continuation. Citing Apple (1993, 1996), Ballantine and Spade (2008) observe that hierarchies of power and domination are maintained when educational institutions are based on “the needs of the dominant capitalist group serving the purposes of that group maintaining hierarchies of power and dominance [...] by motivating higher class [caste] students to achieve and decreasing the ambitions of others [Dalit]” (p. 14).

It is impossible to deny that caste hierarchy in India continues to prevail, obstructing the progress of the Dalit, who often feel alienated from mainstream formal education. Moreover, the impetus among upper-caste elites to preserve the hierarchy inevitably impacts on the allocation of Quota scholarships (Verma & Singh, 2005). Professor Singh agreed, commenting:

Although I was offered scholarships through the Quota System and the system has been helpful to me, there are many of those Dalit individuals who don't [...] who I feel bear the brunt of rejection due to upper-caste

management and control in high places on the committees. (Interview – 24/07/09)

A Quota scholarship recipient himself, Professor Singh acknowledged that the government has provided scholarships with the aim of securing the educational advancement of Dalit communities. However, the scholarship policy envisioned by the government has not been fully implemented, and has not enabled sufficient numbers of Dalit to access universities. Money set aside for the educational and social upliftment of the Dalit has lacked proper management by non-Dalit administrators. Professor Singh addressed this issue in the following terms:

Management is still dominated, ruled and controlled by non-Dalit, and Dalit are still looked down upon. They make the Dalit feel entirely undeserving. I feel that the Quota System should remain to help those Dalit who can't access universities. (Interview – 24/07/09)

Professor Singh identifies a trend among universities of appointing non-Dalit to management positions, thus potentially perpetuating caste bias against the Dalit. Access to learning has been restricted for Dalit individuals at every stage of the educational process, and Thorat (2009) believes it still to be the case that “the percentage of representation of Dalit falls below the stipulated Quota” (p. 80). The reasons for this are to be found in the lack of measures implemented to monitor and control the 15% proportion of seats reserved for Dalit candidates (Jogdand, 2007).

In summary, the Quota System has offered concessions and incentives (including scholarships and hostel accommodation) to support the Dalit in gaining access to and participating in university education. However, Dalit applicants, as well as students and faculty members, have consistently been marginalised at the hands of their non-Dalit counterparts by deliberate inconsistencies and corrupt practices in the allocation of Quota benefits (Sharma, 2002).

5.3.3 The Problem of Corruption

Chalam (2007) affirms that the corruption endemic within India's caste hierarchy will continue to thrive unless caste prejudice is eradicated by "radical transformation minimizing traditional control over modern education" (p. 63). No government ministers or bureaucrats are dedicated to upholding the rights established for the Dalit in India's Constitution. Prabhakar (2005) claims that Dalits consider government bureaucrats to be "dishonest self-seekers denying support for the progress and upliftment of their Dalit communities" (p. 114). Although bureaucrats and Dalit leaders alike have promised to make provision for improving Quota policies, they have done so, according to Chalam (2007), only to further their own social, political and economic interests. Dr. Khanna explained:

Unfortunately, corruption is present within professional courses (medical, engineering, computer-related, and business) at educational institutions. They remain corrupted to the present day. Non-Dalit gain access to places easily, whereas the Dalit have little or no access. (Interview – 13/08/09)

Weidman and Enkhjargal (2008) argue that "corruption often promotes social inequality and undermines social cohesion [...] resulting in corrupt practices of educational administrators and government officials" (p. 64). Corruption has sown its seed in the Quota System (Jogdand, 2007). The distribution of benefits to the Dalit by the Indian government is notoriously inconsistent. Weidman and Enkhjargal (2008) also believe that "in a society where dishonesty and corruption are rampant, the ethical cost of corruption in education can be higher" (p. 64). Waite *et al.* (2005), quoting from *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (2002), detail the existence of "corruption in institutions of higher education in developing countries such as Columbia, China, Georgia and India" (p. 286). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reported in 2009 that "academic corruption is more serious in some parts of India [...] in addition

academic administrators and sometimes professors may practise bribery” (p. 193). Despite the efforts made via the Quota System to improve Dalit access to university education, it is clear that corruption cannot be eradicated by laws alone. Dr. Lal commented:

Yes, the Quota System benefits [the Dalit...] but to a certain level. It is not fully implemented [...] or I should say not rigorously implemented. Corruption at both the administrative and management levels is still very present today. (Interview – 03/09/09)

In Dr Lal’s view, the Quota policy and its procedures pose additional challenges to Dalit access to higher education (Chalam, 2007). Some individuals in the upper echelons of university management engage in corrupt practices of systematic exploitation, domination and control (Shinde, 2005). However, Professor Bhatia’s response to the question of potential corruption in the university sector was dismissive:

It is often claimed that non-Dalit within university management are corrupt. Well [...] first let me point out [...] it would be illegal to misuse Quota places reserved solely for Dalit access. OK, [...] what I mean to say is that [...] it is unlawful to lie to a Dalit applicant by telling him or her that no Quota seats are available, when in fact they are. One can’t just say to a Dalit candidate, ‘No Quota seats available—sorry!!’ A legal process is involved here [...] and one is not allowed to allot a Quota seat to an individual of another caste if there are Dalit candidates waiting to be admitted via the Quota System. (Interview – 18/09/09)

Professor Bhatia argued that providing a Quota seat to a person other than a Dalit would be in breach of the law. However, Mungekar (1999) believes that the “intervention of the government in the overall management [if not in every case]

champions the interest of the ruling castes who control and command the resources” (p. 138). Mungekar (1999) goes on to argue that the Dalit are “less adequately protected even in the presence of a constitutionally prescribed reservation policy rule” (p. 140). On the subject of reduced access to Quota benefits, Professor Singh commented:

At times the Quota policy is not fully implemented because corruption in the management level still exists. Higher management is controlled by corrupt non-Dalit [high-castes]. (Interview – 24/07/09)

Paswan (2003) believes that “had the Quotas been implemented successfully, a new India would have emerged with more or less equality in status in perhaps a decade or two” (p. 181). Yet ongoing caste dominance ensures that the reins of education remain firmly in the hands of the upper castes or classes. Members of university management have made little effort to develop or support measures for promoting Dalit admission into universities, or to investigate the problems associated with corruption (Narkhede, 2001) – which, in the case of the University of Shah Jahan, often go unacknowledged and unchallenged at an administrative level. Discriminatory behaviour adopted by non-Dalit management against the Dalits continues to hinder the latter’s social mobility in a variety of ways. These will be examined in the subsequent section.

5.4 Discrimination

In this section, I will explore the diverse facets of discrimination reported by both Dalit and non-Dalit faculty respondents. Interview excerpts are analysed in order more fully to comprehend the discrimination that confronts the Dalit on a day-to-day basis in higher education.

5.4.1 Caste Mind-set

Chaudhari (2008) describes the widespread conviction that “the servile caste [Dalit] are born [as] such [...] in other words no human law can unmake or uncaste them” (p. 683). The intense caste bias that characterises Indian society “has developed and is deepening on caste lines in the forms of caste hatred prevailing even today in the upper-caste mind-set” (Chaudhari, 2008, p. 683). This “ideology is centred on the perception of purity and pollution” (Rana, 2008, p. 6). In short, Dalits are considered too “impure, too polluted, to rank as worthy beings within the caste’s rigid social codes” (Rana, 2008, pp. 52-53). Chalam (2007) traces the evolution of this attitude within Indian culture towards “the legitimacy and maintenance of a caste biased mind-set, which education has failed to dispel” (p. 89).

Jogdand (2007) reports that non-Dalit often “challenge their [Dalits'] caste identity in everyday social settings or in the field of scholarship”. During interview, Dr. Khanna made the following observations:

Non-Dalit faculty members were hesitant about my arrival at first. As a Dalit, I was working on probation, and under continual scrutiny. The non-Dalit faculty did not interact much with me, but I did not let them hinder me. It is unfortunate that a caste-biased mind-set still prevails among educated people, and that they continue to discriminate against others. Caste tension is still very present. In spite of my publications, non-Dalit do not congratulate me or show any signs of gratitude. (Interview – 13/08/09)

It should be noted here that a caste-biased mind-set promotes hostility from non-Dalit faculty members towards their Dalit peers. Whether consciously or subconsciously, university staff and administrators may perpetuate their own internalised caste values in their interactions with others, thus posing a threat to the inclusion of the Dalit (Reddy *et al.*, 2004). Rajawat (2004) insists that the “the

ruling elite caste is often devoid of ethics and honesty in life, and the values of justice are yet alien to them” (p. 13). Professor Singh shared his experience of such a caste-based mind-set:

Caste is ingrained in every individual’s psyche. Caste affiliation is part of an individual’s identity. And with this identity usually comes some form of prejudice and discrimination – however subtle, and whether the individual is a student, a professor, an employee, and so on. The Dalit have come a long way over the years, but continue to struggle for their rights. Although I’ve secured a prestigious academic position as a professor, as a person I continue to be reminded of my caste – that is, where and to whom I belong – by non-Dalits. It is far more difficult for Dalits to escape their caste affiliation. (Interview – 24/07/09)

Professor Singh’s emphasis on caste identity reflects the age-old tradition of caste hierarchy that is continually “rekindled and reforged” (Gorringe, 2005, p. 86). Again, this is self-perpetuating: classification by caste leads to the categorisation of individuals, which in turn encourages the formation of various caste identities. The dominance of high-caste non-Dalits over their Dalit counterparts all too often goes unquestioned and unchallenged (Sheth, 1997; Nirula, 2005). Professor Singh’s description of the interference and intermittent coercion staged by non-Dalit toward Dalit staff at the University of Shah Jahan is entirely consistent with the characteristically high-caste perception of culturally and religiously sanctioned dominance.

Certain high-caste individuals purposefully enforce caste hierarchy in order to maintain and preserve social categories. Their elevated status may make them disinclined to identify with the Dalit caste. Paswan and Jaideva (2002) claim that many Dalit have become victims of these traditional cultural practices because societal norms “reinforce caste-culture”, which in turn promote prejudice and

oppression (p. 19). Caste, Channa (2005) believes, “has become synonymous with human identity to the extent that most Indians cannot think of themselves as being apart from their castes” (p. 52).

5.4.2 Prejudice Among Faculty Members: Issues and Concerns

Evidently, therefore, Indian society is faced with the ongoing challenge of prejudiced and biased behaviour (Mungekar, 1999). For Mungekar (1999), “prejudiced, caste-ridden social arrangements are more likely to create an unfavourable situation [...] even for the meritorious among the Dalit” (p. 140). Prejudice against Dalits, as Paswan (2003) observes, occurs “on the basis of birth and not worth” (p. 161). Furthermore, the resulting disadvantages to the Dalit are strengthened over time. Shinde (2005) believes that “caste prejudice supports such [discriminatory] behaviour, leading to additional disadvantages” for lower-caste individuals (p. 72). The failure of the government to investigate the reality of the Dalits’ situation today, despite explicit signs of their oppression, has further isolated Dalit communities from mainstream academia (Shinde, 2005). In interview, Professor Kapoor added that:

There are still problems faced by Dalit academics today. Non-Dalit still rule the upper management and administrative levels. (Interview – 17/07/09)

Verdugo (2003) is of the view that ‘in academe, prejudice serves to preserve privilege for the ruling majority’ (p. 244). Hogg and Vaughan (2008) characterise prejudice as an “unfavourable attitude towards a social group and its members” (p. 350). In Professor Kapoor’s view, prejudice has led to a distribution of power which precludes equality of “civil, social, political, and cultural rights” (Shinde, 2005, p. 69). There is a strongly felt and preserved distinction between ‘we’ (non-

Dalit) and ‘they’ (Dalit). Paswan (2003) argues that “upper-caste networks [...] are very common”, and that individuals of higher castes “prefer to further their goal by associating with and helping their caste members only” (p. 162). Nambissan (2002) claims that “official reports tend to ignore [...] the deleterious effect that segregation and discrimination have on Dalit in general” (p. 86). In such cases, Dalit academics fall victim to the strictures of caste belief so staunchly upheld by the highly educated non-Dalit.

Dr. Khanna made the following observation:

There is a DNA of caste bias, and it continues uncontested. And this system within India is created systematically. (Interview – 13/08/09)

Nambissan (2002) concurs: “this pernicious practice of caste bias is still widespread in India” (p. 92). Rana (2008) describes “an inbuilt caste bias [...] reflected at two levels – mentality [...] and external behaviour” (pp. 347-348). The segregation of Dalit faculty members (in academic contexts, for example, as well as in college canteens and at social get-togethers) plays a key role in the system of structured inequality. As Verdugo (2003) observes, the systematic segregation of Dalit from non-Dalit “tends to stigmatize them [the Dalit] negatively” (p. 244). Dr. Khanna’s comments reflect the fact that, generally speaking, present-day Indian society rarely challenges the centuries-old dominance of the high castes (Brahmins). For example (as discussed in Chapter 2), the recruitment of high-caste non-Dalit into the upper levels of management and bureaucracy in higher education institutions may hinder the progression of Dalit in those institutions. In such cases, non-Dalit gain the benefits rightly deserved by Dalit students and faculty (Narkhede, 2001). As Professor Singh observed in interview:

In this large city Dalit don’t face so much prejudice in everyday life as in rural areas. Over the past sixty years, I believe improvements have been

made, but we should be mindful that these are still slack in their implementation, and problematic even today in the universities. With all my education, as the most educated person from my village and district, I'm still looked down upon as a Dalit. All my education does not matter in my native village. Caste matters over there, and discrimination is still vigorous. Even educated faculty practice discrimination in spite of all their education [...] they still have prejudice against Dalit. (Interview – 24/07/09)

Village settings often share religious convictions about the practice of untouchability (Ghose, 2003). High-caste non-Dalit in villages preserve the caste bias within the Indian mind-set, as Professor Singh's description of his own village background indicates. Although, in cities, caste-based discriminatory practices do not operate so overtly as in rural village settings (where antipathy to an individual's touch or shadow, refusal to share seats, etc., remain prominent) (Ghose, 2003), more subtle forms persist. In Sharma's (1994) words, "high castes still posit themselves as having the privilege of access" to education on the grounds of the caste system, which relegates the Dalit to the position of "lowest caste" (p. 60). Professor Singh stated that:

As a Dalit I'm very aware of the climate of prejudice and discrimination; and I feel sad to see that non-Dalit, even after securing higher education and societal awareness, continue to uphold the hierarchy of caste. (Interview – 24/07/09)

Professor Singh makes a critical observation: that no matter how educated non-Dalits may be, many persist in caste-biased attitudes and practices. He argues that, having a distinct edge over Dalit individuals, non-Dalit are more inclined to associate themselves with identically placed persons, thereby dissociating themselves from members of the Dalit caste. This dissociation lays the groundwork for exploitation. Kivel (2002) points out that "minority people are extremely

isolated and acutely vulnerable to abuse [...] and do not have much support” (p. 235). Such prejudiced attitudes lead all the more readily, therefore, to discrimination, segregation and inequality. As in Professor Singh’s experience, Paswan (2003) reports that “equality does not carry any weight, especially when Dalit individuals are denied freedom of speech, expression, profession etc.” (p. 142). Unfortunately, India’s ruling class has almost invariably fallen back on the easy option of allowing exploitation to persist rather than changing the system or challenging a mind-set that continues to perpetuate discrimination. Unsurprisingly, caste bias has caused tensions in the relationship between non-Dalit and Dalit faculty at the University of Shah Jahan. This will be examined in the next section.

5.4.3 Dalit and Non-Dalit Faculty: Their Relationship and Rapport

Chalam (2007) claims that discriminatory attitudes have penetrated university management and administration, as well as causing acute antipathy between non-Dalit and Dalit. Dalit faculty members in higher education often report being made to feel worthless by discrimination from non-Dalit. An example of such discrimination is offered by Dr. Lal:

I had to put in more hours than a regular non-Dalit staff member, strive to write more articles [...] and publish more than non-Dalit staff [...] my teaching was closely scrutinised, unlike that of non-Dalit staff [...] I would sometimes have another younger non-Dalit staff member to supervise my teaching and note how well I performed in class [...] this would never happen to other staff. At times students were questioned in private about my teaching methods in class [...] and the list goes on and on. In short, as a Dalit I encountered these issues because a few powerful non-Dalit staff were/are looking for ways to remove or replace me. We have a few

incompetent junior non-Dalit staff here. And yes [...] I felt uneasy about my Dalit identity and still do sometimes. (Interview – 03/09/09)

Dr. Lal reported that caste plays a vital part in the appointment of individuals within the academic hierarchy. He believes that the academic sphere is one place in which caste discrimination is still being practised. Recounting his own experiences, Dr. Lal described the monopoly of upper castes in Shah Jahan, and recounted Dalits' experiences of either being set apart or more directly locked out of participation in academic life. Unequal practices include surveillance of lectures; being passed over for promotion in the faculty; the lack of any forum in which to protest against caste injustices; and an inadequate system in place to protect Dalit staff. These injustices result, at least in part, from a caste hegemony that may go unrecognised in the university (Shinde, 2005). Professor Kapoor described similar experiences, stating:

As a Dalit, I encountered these issues because a few powerful non-Dalit staff were/are looking for ways to remove or replace me. Management/administration and other members of staff usually prefer to choose a non-Dalit as head of department. And yes, I've known heads of department who were far younger and more inexperienced than me. (Interview – 17/07/09)

As reported by Professor Kapoor, the Dalit may be deprived of opportunities for advancement by gradual segregation from the rest of the faculty. Kivel (2002) believes that if "a minority [Dalit] challenges the traditional [departmental] values of the institution they are screened out, isolated, fired, or otherwise neutralised" (p. 235). To a large extent, social background determines an individual's future (Reddy *et al.*, 2004); and the social is tied to the religious. Belonging to a high caste with religiously sanctioned social privileges allows non-Dalit to challenge any privileges gained by their Dalit peers. According to Professor Kapoor, the non-Dalit faculty

members at the University of Shah Jahan would prefer non-Dalit academics to be appointed.

In Professor Kapoor's experience, there is a particular trend inhibiting the advancement of Dalit individuals in the university hierarchy. Together, the attitudes and behaviour of the dominant non-Dalit staff comprise systematic discrimination, to which Dalit staff are highly vulnerable. He argues that caste discrimination and prejudice are ingrained within both higher education and academia. In the light of this, it is easy to infer that caste identity may play an important role in the appointment of faculty to the academic hierarchy, circumventing the rhetoric of equality in the higher education environment. Dr. Khanna, recounting his own experience, pointed out that:

Generally speaking, my relations with a few non-Dalit are okay at face value, I would say. We are cordial during staff meetings, or rather exchange pleasantries when we pass in the corridor [...] or similar. I am not a major part of their management meetings like other senior non-Dalit staff members. I mean they would not invite me to join them [...]. As I mentioned before, as a Dalit I was under constant watch. There are huge caste issues within this faculty – not on the face of it, but rather an underlying sense of discrimination. As a Dalit, I know where I stand. (Interview – 13/08/09)

In Dr. Khanna's view, the behaviour of non-Dalit faculty is characterised by a superficial veneer of acceptance. Non-Dalit faculty members, according to their customs and beliefs, usually distance themselves socially from their Dalit peers. Rajawat (2004) believes that “educated Dalit elite prefer to move and interact more widely within their own caste status” (p. 89). Interaction between non-Dalit and Dalit academics lies somewhere between inclusion and segregation. Professor Singh reported an experience closer to the latter:

Staff interaction is often limited. Hierarchy issues always prevail. It is evident to me that the non-Dalits don't like a Dalit in a higher position. In my case, as a Head of Department [*speaking quietly*] non-Dalit did not respect me or my position. (Interview – 24/07/09)

Professor Singh's comments clearly indicate the presence of overt discrimination against Dalit faculty at the University of Shah Jahan. One might imagine that educational achievement would allow an individual to move beyond the strictures of age-old caste customs denying the dignity of others. However, it is not so; these perceptions are often culturally produced and maintained. The dominant high-caste elite legitimise caste ranking by encouraging the Dalit to accept their lowly position within the caste-based social hierarchy (Bourdieu, 1990). This form of stigmatisation promotes the belief that certain groups are inferior – even within the groups themselves (Reddy, 2004). Professor Singh reports that, as a Dalit, caste greatly restricts his professional and social relationships. Shinde (2005) believes that in such cases “discriminatory processes can be based on cultural/customary beliefs and practices” (p. 66). In such instances, under-representation is clearly a result of discrimination. Upper-caste communities consider themselves to occupy a superior status, and treat Dalit according to their own internalised caste bias (Reddy, 2004). During interview, Dr. Lal offered an example:

I have been in this department all these years [...] but in terms of career advancement as such, I have not benefited at all. Management/administration and other staff usually prefer to choose a non-Dalit as head of the department. And yes, I've worked under heads of department who were far younger and not as experienced as me. (Interview – 03/09/09)

Despite the Quota policy's far-reaching aim to promote Dalit access to higher education, caste bias continues to exist as a day-to-day reality within today's university setting. In the University of Shah Jahan, for instance, the cultural supremacy of high-castes remains virtually intact (Ghose, 2003). In Dr. Lal's experience, non-Dalit faculty members – who represent the numerical majority – control the opportunities available within academic departments. While initial access (to a faculty position, for instance) may be available, there is no internal mobility in terms of promotion within the department. This situation seems unlikely to change.

The large-scale oppression of Dalit communities in democratic India has cumulatively resulted in their vulnerability and subjection to the whims of non-Dalits. It is disquieting to note that Dalit are all too frequently unable “to escape the segregation dictated by upper-caste tradition” (Thorat, 2009, p. 135). This segregation is characterised by sustained acts of discriminatory behaviour, and has found its way into many social arenas. Professor Kapoor (a Dalit) shared his own experiences of segregation:

Having learned of my caste affiliation, my non-Dalit colleagues started to ignore me, and would go to lunch without me. We still converse professionally and discuss departmental issues, but on a personal level, the time we used to spend eating lunch in the university canteen has decreased significantly. (Interview – 17/07/09)

In terms of the continuation of caste discrimination and society's progress more generally, the individual Indian psyche still appears to be rooted in caste discrimination against the Dalit (Stern, 2003). Professor Kapoor described the very visible consequences of caste difference between non-Dalit and Dalit faculty within the university setting. In his view, a Dalit staff member is likely to be ignored and excluded by a group of higher-caste staff members in communal dining areas of the

university, and sometimes at formal get-togethers. He believes that non-Dalits frequently base their grievances against the Dalit and their reluctance to include their Dalit peers on the religious and cultural dogma of Hinduism. It is important to note that, despite the fact that discriminatory behaviour in all its forms appears to be wide-spread within the university, the University of Shah Jahan lacks a formal support system for the Dalit minority. There is currently no provision made by the university to support its Dalit staff in their professional lives.

Nambissan (2002) found that “inter-dining between the Dalit and other castes is rarely reported in studies” (p. 92). This is usually due to the religious sanctions practised by many non-Dalits of high-caste origin. Paswan (2003) comments that “at times non-Dalit treat Dalit as their equals [e.g. in academia], and allow them all sort of privileges, but choose not to fraternize with them [at meals, social functions, ceremonies, etc.] on the basis of caste differences” (p. 142). For example, if a high-caste lecturer learns of a Dalit lecturer with the same academic ranking in the same institution, it may be that the Dalit staff member in question will be ignored by higher-caste staff in social places (such as the university cafeteria), as well as in social gatherings and informal meetings. Such attitudes shape the day-to-day experience of Dalit academics, subjugating them both socially and culturally via various techniques of marginalisation (Mendelsohn & Vicziany, 1998). Professor Singh, for instance, stated:

I always felt inferior and insecure. This feeling is due to being a Dalit.
(Interview – 24/07/09)

Reddy *et al.* (2004) believe that “the image of inferiority that one is born with gives the Dalit a feeling of diffidence, low self-esteem, fear, anxiety and various other negative emotions” (p. 108). As in Professor Singh’s experience, being treated as inferior can lead an individual to internalise a lack of confidence. This inferiority

complex may itself pose an obstacle to Dalits' success and achievement (Mendelsohn & Vicziany, 1998).

Yet Professor Singh himself may be regarded as a 'creamy-layer' Dalit (the concept is further explored in Chapter 8), who has achieved high-level educational qualifications and a faculty position at one of the country's premier universities. A successful academic career and social life represent major accomplishments, especially in contrast to the lives of other educationally under-privileged Dalit. However, it is important to reflect on the hurdles Professor Singh is likely to have surmounted, and the challenges he continues to face in the faculty environment. In the eyes of some of the non-Dalit members of the University of Shah Jahan, Professor Singh's academic success is significantly obscured by his Dalit identity.

5.4.4 Discrimination and Non-Dalit Students

Crucially, the cycle of discrimination encountered by Dalit faculty members is perpetrated not only by non-Dalit faculty members, but non-Dalit students too. For example, Dr. Lal described caste-based discrimination from students in his own experience as a lecturer. He stated:

As a young Dalit staff recruit I did come across some really hard-to-deal-with students. I feel maybe because they were from good grammar schools. I have a vernacular tone [...] I mean I don't speak in a polished manner like these grammar-school students. But I would definitely notice students whispering and making fun of me after class, and they would even, at times, question me in class imitating my style of pronunciation [...] which I felt was patronising and demeaning at some level. Students who did that I remember were asked to leave my class. But then I had to face the

consequences at the management level, especially if there were complaints made by the rich non-Dalit grammar-school students. So it can get a bit tricky and slippery at a higher level, and I had to be careful, and at times just put up with it. (Interview – 03/09/09)

The lack of comprehensive protective measures for Dalit faculty members is far from satisfactory. Paswan (2003) believes that “educated Dalit are taunted and teased and constantly reminded of the unfairness of their privileges” (p. 161). Educated non-Dalit students are often disrespectful to their Dalit teachers and lecturers, despite the presumed authority of faculty members in a classroom environment. Mocking a lecturer’s accent is a clear example of prejudiced behaviour. At the university level, management clearly fails to intervene to maintain social justice and ensure that Dalit educators are treated with appropriate respect. This failure can itself be assumed to result from caste prejudice, according to which individuals are “discriminated against due to a particular group membership” (Bajpai, 2006, p. 329). Dr. Mandeep (a Dalit) also experiences discrimination from her students. She shared the following experience:

As the only Dalit female faculty member [in my department], it is hard to escape prejudice. When students learn of my caste affiliation they do not take me that seriously [...] or listen to my class lectures [...] but instead spend time talking to other students when I am present in the classroom. It can be really frustrating to receive vibes from students that I’m not worthy of the position of faculty member. (Interview – 21/08/09)

Parson (1999) adds that “disaffection, disruption and exclusion are [also] found in advantaged groups” such as that of the non-Dalit (p. 64). In Dr. Mandeep’s case, the students’ disrespectful behaviour impinges on the social and cultural processes of university learning. A lack of respect or recognition from students makes Dalit lecturers such as Dr. Mandeep victims of social exclusion, via indirect and subtle

means. Frustratingly, Dr. Mandeep finds her role as a teacher to be further compromised by her identity as a Dalit female.

The Dalit faculty respondents shared their concerns about the caste-discriminatory attitudes (i.e. non-Dalits against Dalits) that prevail within the Indian educational system. Dr. Khanna opined that:

The government needs to take strong steps to disallow the practice of discrimination and allow Dalit to be looked upon favourably by other non-Dalit individuals in today's educational institutional settings [...] and society too. (Interview – 13/08/09)

Here, Dr. Khanna starkly delineates the difficulties faced by Dalit faculty members. The data examined previously in this chapter reflects the scope of discriminatory practices in the experience of Dr. Lal and others, and indicates the need for increased measures to protect Dalit staff from both overt and indirect prejudice from students and faculty. Dr. Khanna calls on the Indian government for policy interventions to monitor unfair practices in higher education, as Dalit faculty remain culturally segregated and under-represented in the university environment.

5.4.5 Gender and Discrimination: The Experiences of Dalit Female Faculty Members

The under-representation of Dalit faculty is especially evident in the case of Dalit females. Anand (2005) observes that “Dalit women are the most marginalized in the caste hierarchy of Indian society” (p. 110). The challenges faced by Dalit females include various forms of discrimination and repression which are all too often “legitimised through social institutions and legal structures” (Punalekar, 1995, p. 8). Thorough and careful study is required to understand the “nature of the

limitations that affect the Dalit women in their performance in society and their level of social status” (Prabhavathi, 1995, p. 82). The University of Shah Jahan has failed to produce adequate support for its Dalit female staff. In interview, Dr. Mandeep described her experience of discrimination, stating that:

Prejudice against Dalit females is much stronger than that directed at their Dalit male counterparts. This university has small numbers of Dalit females employed in academic departments. I have often felt sidelined. In staff meetings my opinions fall upon deaf ears. That’s frustrating. Meetings are usually chaired by non-Dalit, who dominate the department’s lectureship positions. (Interview – 20/08/09)

Dr. Mandeep’s experience reflects the presence of a dominant caste ideology that hinders the participation of female Dalit faculty members in a higher education setting. In Dr Mandeep’s view, Dalit women encounter unjust restrictions within the university environment (Anand, 2005). She is alienated by both her caste and gender, which deny her rights and privileges. Dr. Srivastav shared a similar experience:

The departmental setting continues to be dominated by men. The non-Dalit faculty in charge deny my position and override my presence and personal views in favour of those expressed by non-Dalit female faculty members, giving me a sense that I don’t have my own say in departmental issues or plans [...] These caste-prejudiced attitudes often make me feel isolated. (Interview - 17/08/09)

Dr. Srivastav’s experience within an elite university setting illustrates twin sources of exclusion – caste and gender. India’s patriarchal system seeks to justify male control over women (Aleman & Renn, 2002). Women’s education is thus inhibited, generally resulting in unequal educational opportunities. Compared to Dalit males,

Dalit females tend to encounter additional forms of prejudice, both culturally and socially (Seenarine, 2004). Dr. Srivastav reports that her presence within her department often seems to go unrecognised and undervalued. These forms of discrimination devalue equality and even academic recognition by associating Dalit identity with a reduced social status (Narayan, 2006). As a university lecturer, Dr. Srivastav has attained a higher professional status than many other Dalit women; however, caste and gender prejudice linger. In Dr. Srivastav's experience, the lack of support from university management makes this prejudice especially difficult to combat. Due to her caste and gender, she suffers systematic discrimination from faculty members that restricts her mobility within the department hierarchy. When Dr. Mandeep was asked to describe her relationship with the non-Dalit faculty women in her department, she gave the following response:

Well [...] I'm the only Dalit faculty member in this department. The female non-Dalit members and I don't share much of a conversation *per se* [...] I mean [...] we do say hello to each other cordially, but don't engage in casual conversations. We sometimes discuss certain academic stuff for workshops or seminars within the department. Although [...] sometimes I do feel left out when non-Dalit teaching staff get together and talk about departmental stuff in a group. The attitude of non-Dalit male staff, which I mentioned earlier [...] I feel that I get the same attitude from non-Dalit female staff too. They usually don't make me feel that uncomfortable on a face-to-face basis [...] but then [...] I do get a sense of being secluded from departmental staff get-togethers. Well [...] I guess that's how it is.
(Interview – 21/08/09)

As Dr. Mandeep reports, the behaviour of both men and women reflects the current caste divide. Here, the exclusion she describes indicates the discrimination present in Indian academia today. As Prabhavathi (1995) explains, "upper-caste women

who have authority and influence have not worked for the betterment of Dalit women” (p. 83).

The marginalisation of Dalit women in the higher education setting denies them the possibility of representation in the field of academia (Bhagwat, 1995). Although Dalit women actively participate in various areas of social and political life, and engage dynamically in secular professional activities (Punalekar, 1995), they nonetheless fall victim to the prejudices of their non-Dalit peers. The impact of gender and caste bias is accompanied by a lack of appropriate support and protection from university administration and management. The marginalisation of Dalit women in the university faculty environment calls for deeper scrutiny of the issues they face (see also Chapter 7).

Professor Singh (a Dalit) was asked for his opinion on the issue of Dalit female faculty, to which he responded:

Unfortunately this department does not have any Dalit females in its faculty. This faculty is predominantly male, except for two non-Dalit female lecturers. Frankly speaking [...] I am a minority person too in this situation [...] however [...] I personally feel that compared to Dalit male lecturers in this university [...] who are themselves far fewer than non-Dalit males [...] the situation is far worse for Dalit females. I mean [...] I suspect that [...] a non-Dalit female might be preferred to a Dalit female. This seems clear from the lack of Dalit female academics in this university [...] I feel their presence in academia is almost negligible compared to non-Dalit. (Interview – 24/07/09)

The paucity of Dalit female faculty members in academia was initially raised as an issue during Dr. Srivastav’s interview. She said:

My department does not have any Dalit female faculty members apart from me [...] although I hope we will have one soon. There are Dalit women faculty in other departments [...] but far fewer than Dalit males [...] who too I believe number far less than their non-Dalit counterparts. Although [...] I sometimes think [...] the university management prefers to recruit Dalit males [...] and non-Dalit females than Dalit females. I do not mean to sound biased in any way [...] but this department has many male non-Dalit members in prominent positions [...] and many of the faculty rules seem to cater to male staff [...] this can be quite frustrating for me as a Dalit female. (Interview – 17/08/09)

Here, Dr. Srivastav brings to the fore the issue of preferential treatment based on caste affiliation. Indeed, she highlights the fact that Dalit females are often deprived of important social resources (Rodrigues, 2006). She also believes that Indian culture today is influenced by patriarchal and hierarchical beliefs that ignore or vilify women (Narayan, 2006).

Pulankar (1995) points out that there is an “absence of national labour policy protecting the needs of Dalit women engaged in the organized sectors such as the University setting” (p. 10). As a result, women “fall victim to gender discrimination in the absence of social safety measures” to protect them (Punalekar, 1995, p. 11). Unfortunately, the inconsistency of the government’s apparently unambiguous pledge to eradicate caste-based discrimination is “legitimised through the maintenance of caste and gender as separate issues” in the political sphere (Rege, 1995, p. 19). In short, India lacks the political inclination and proactive laws to counter gender and caste discrimination in society (Fisher & Ponniah, 2003).

5.4.6 Coping with Discrimination

Caste tensions have negative consequences, and threaten the Dalit in a variety of ways. Chandra (2004) quotes noted Indian anthropologist M. N. Srinivas, who summarises discriminatory attitudes as follows: “I am equal to those who think of themselves as my betters, I am better than those who regard themselves as my equals, and how dare my inferiors claim equality with me?” (p. 75). In India, this kind of mind-set is caste-oriented. Although discrimination may be less overtly evident in an elite university faculty setting, subtle forms of prejudice are likely to be at work. Dr. Lal described his experience as follows:

In this department I have felt alone, eaten lunches alone [...] sat alone among other non-Dalit staff. Now at least I have someone [another Dalit staff member] to identify with, and even share personal exchanges with. I mean [...] although he is young, as a senior staff member I can have good chats and discuss with him both personal and academic stuff. (Interview – 03/09/09)

The silent acts of prejudice described by Dr. Lal may indicate that ‘untouchability’ practices are still at work in the university setting. The respondent prefers to fraternise with a fellow Dalit staff member. Dr. Lal added the following remarks:

In a city like this, I mean I don’t encounter much day-to-day discrimination. In the university, people don’t discriminate outright [...] but yes, they do, as I’ve mentioned, in subtle ways. In such ways non-Dalit staff have made me feel uneasy, especially during my early days as a staff member here. Now, due to my seniority certain new junior staff recruits show me a certain degree of respect, but I feel that this is done out of courtesy, not because they truly feel respectful. I feel, and I’ve witnessed, that non-Dalit junior

staff prefer to be in the company of senior non-Dalit staff and to talk to them. On many occasions the junior Dalit staff and myself have been in one corner sitting and talking to each other rather than interacting socially as a group. (Interview – 03/09/09)

In foregrounding both overt and covert forms of caste bias, Dr. Lal makes a crucial observation. The form of prejudice he describes stems from an attitude of indifference and insensitivity (Paswan, 2003). Dr. Lal's experience indicates inequality at a structural level within both the faculty and the university at large, which in turn contributes to marginalisation and segregation. The continued power and dominance of privileged non-Dalit faculty members mirror the age-old prejudices of the caste system they serve. Conformity to hierarchical caste culture is thus considered legitimate by non-Dalit faculty members, which in turn encourages practices of discrimination and segregation against their Dalit peers (Gnanaraj & Krishnamurthy, 2000).

Not only does discrimination pervade the lives of the Dalit faculty respondents, but they have no effective means of coping, except to ignore the situation and carry on with their daily lives. Given their academic roles within the university, and the sensitivity of the issues involved, most of the Dalit faculty respondents preferred not to delve further into the issues surrounding caste prejudice in the university environment. Indiscretion could cost them their faculty positions, and thus their livelihoods.

5.5. Strategies for Coping/Survival

In this section, the data selected will be used to explore some of the strategies for coping and survival practised by the respondents in response to the oppression

faced by Dalit academics as a result of their surnames and the caste affiliation these names imply.

Dalit family names have an important role in social interaction within Indian society (Nirula, 2005). A person's last name usually identifies the caste to which he or she belongs; most relationships and social contacts are established on the basis of this code. If an individual bears a Dalit surname, he/she is likely to experience prejudice from non-Dalit students. Professor Singh agreed:

An individual's surname indicates that a person belongs to the Dalit caste, increasing the likelihood that he or she will face some form of intolerance from upper-caste students. Therefore, Dalit individuals may change their surnames in order to avoid discrimination. (Interview – 24/07/09)

Dr. Khanna related his own, similar experience of this issue:

Unfortunately my surname marks me out as a Dalit. Surnames often signify one's affiliation with the Dalit caste, which makes that person more likely to face discrimination from non-Dalits. (Interview – 13/08/09)

Village address, body language, and accent also act as signs distinguishing whether or not a person is a Dalit. Many young Dalit students are thus “unable to escape prejudice” in their school or university life (Nirula, 2005, p. 132), leading many Dalit individuals to change their surnames in order to avoid discrimination (Kamble, 2002). Pinto (2001) believes that “centres of higher education [...] perpetuate the notion of [...] superiority and inferiority, high and low.” As a result, the Dalit “find the environment not congenial” (p. 183).

Caste-related discrimination perpetrated by non-Dalits against Dalits can be psychologically disabling. Being treated as inferior can lead Dalits to *feel* inferior,

and may thus reduce their self-confidence. Dalit educators describe similar experiences of discrimination at the hands of non-Dalit academics who “challenge their caste identity in everyday social settings”, or in the field of scholarship (Kamble, 2002, p. 195).

Conversion to another religion is also a common strategy for deflecting caste discrimination within the University of Shah Jahan. Dr. Lal was aware of this practice:

Religious conversion, for a Dalit, represented an escape from the atrocities of the Hindu religion. It was only through conversion that the Dalit could hope to secure a sense of freedom. That is why Buddhism was looked upon with so much favour, as this religion is balanced and treats every individual with dignity and respect. (Interview – 03/09/09)

In addition to Buddhism, many Dalit have converted to Christianity, Islam, and Sikhism to escape the clutches of Hinduism and its rigid religious tenets (Das, 2004). Converting to Buddhism (also practised by Dr. Ambedkar) has proved a particularly popular option among Dalit. Yet although such a conversion may bring about a tremendous change in individual consciousness, it has had little effect on the treatment of Dalits within the university environment, or in Indian society in general. As Sadangi (2008) observes, “social stigma [...] does not vanish when Dalit turn to another religion” (p. 131).

Aside from the more drastic measures of changing one’s surname or switching religious affiliation, strategies involving other people have often helped Dalit faculty members to cope well in the university environment. These strategies may include group meetings of Dalit faculty, or more informal friendships. One Dalit faculty member, Dr. Khanna, shared his experience of such ‘human agency’ solutions:

Generally, in order to cope with my situation I prefer to talk to my own friends. In the university a few of us Dalit faculty members from different departments sometimes get together [...] maybe once or twice a month outside the university campus at a nearby restaurant or coffee house [...] and we share and talk about our issues or concerns, or sometimes just joke about certain matters in order to feel at ease. This kind of get-together with other Dalit faculty members has certainly helped me, and the rest of us, to cope more effectively with our situation in the university. (Interview - 17/07/09)

Pinto (2000) claims that the Dalit community exhibits “a group identity [rather] than an individual identity” (p. 182). In the case of Dr. Khanna, this trend towards group activity is clearly identifiable. Sharing a social background allows the Dalit faculty at the University of Shah Jahan to confide in others and thereby cope more successfully with their own experiences of discrimination.

Professor Kapoor, another member of the university’s Dalit faculty, also described his close friendships with other Dalit individuals as a support or coping mechanism:

Being a minority Dalit faculty member in the University of Shah Jahan, surrounded by non-Dalits, can be daunting at times. It’s not easy for us [...] you know [...] and as a Dalit it can get really stressful having to confront casteist [caste-biased] attitudes from them [i.e., non-Dalit]. In tense times I usually share really personal issues with a good Dalit family friend who extends his support to me. That way I’m able to keep going. (Interview - 03/09/09)

Unequal social structures within the university and elsewhere continue to ensure that the Dalits’ social situation goes unacknowledged, or even denied. Mander

(2002) believes that the “paramount aspiration of the Dalit is [...] equality and dignity within the traditional social order [i.e. the caste system] which has denied them justice and self-respect” (pp. 147-148). There seems to be little of substance in the university environment to redress or ameliorate the Dalits’ situation. In Professor Kapoor’s view, the University of Shah Jahan has ignored the needs of its Dalit students and faculty members. Like Dr. Khanna, Professor Kapoor too has found himself in a vulnerable position, with no guidance or support provided by the university itself; his only recourse is to close friends who offer their advice and support.

5.6. Discussion and Conclusion

Although the cohort of Dalit faculty at the University of Shah Jahan is small, and their personal claims strong, this study’s investigation of their individual experiences offers us a glimpse of their lived reality, and how they experience being a Dalit academic within an elite university environment. The hierarchical organisation of Indian society requires much closer attention for its role in undermining the Dalits’ socio-economic progress (Ram, 2002). Their distinct and inescapable social identity as ‘Dalit’ continues to hinder their development (Ram, 2002). Laws have been implemented to safeguard the interests of the Dalits in every sphere of life, social, economic and political; however, none of these changes have been fully acted upon. This research study explores the tensions and challenges experienced by Dalit faculty members during their working life in an elite university setting, and indicates the need for further and more in-depth research into the situation of Dalit faculty in higher education.

Although the Quota policy offers some hope of the Dalits’ gaining increased access to higher education, they continue to face prejudiced and unjust treatment. The University of Shah Jahan has made a formal commitment to equality and respect

for all in its pledge (see Chapter 4); yet the reality is quite the opposite, as evidenced by the respondents' experiences of the university environment. Ram (2002) claims that the Quota policy offers "provisions and measures [...] to enable Dalits [...] to achieve [...] national progress". Nonetheless, "at the implementation level the situation is not very satisfactory" (p. 377). Moreover, the Dalit have further hurdles to overcome. Faculty members also have to deal with exclusion from their non-Dalit colleagues. Based on the evidence provided by the participants in this study, the constitutional provisions and measures devised to safeguard the interests of the Dalits continue to be neglected by the University of Shah Jahan.

The term 'justice' as used in the Constitution includes the social, political and economic entitlements provided as fundamental Constitutional rights to all citizens in India. Likewise, 'social justice' designates equality for all individuals with no social divisions based on caste, religion, colour, race, sex, ethnicity, etc. This combination of social justice and economic justice (Rizvi, 2009) includes what is known as distributive justice, which – as in the case of the Quota policy – allows (some) marginalised individuals like the Dalit access to (some) equal social and political rights. With regard to Dalit faculty members, theories of distribution and the recognition/participation dilemma (Fraser, 1995) come into play. One might argue that the privileges afforded by the Quota policy provide for and maintain a degree of equality of participation in higher education for the Dalit faculty, as a form of distributive justice. However, the Dalit faculty members who participated in this study describe experiences of inequality and marginalisation, both implicit and explicit that characterise the recognition/participation dilemma. That is, even though Dalit faculty members at the University of Shah Jahan work alongside their non-Dalit colleagues in various university departments, as well as functioning as part of the academic administration, their subjection to exclusionary treatment by the non-Dalits (who dine separately from the Dalit faculty, hold exclusive personal conversations, etc.) continues in their day-to-day working lives. Thus, the complex and multi-dimensional aspects of social justice such as respect, recognition and

associational forms of justice are not all expressed in the Indian Constitution (i.e. the Quota policy is only a distributive justice measure). These necessary dimensions of social justice (Gewirtz, 2006) remain in practice unacknowledged, unfulfilled and unquestioned by the university authorities.

Futhermore, critics may argue that the Dalit faculty members interviewed in this study are in a much better position than many other Dalits who lack the privilege of working in a premier university. This is certainly the case when compared to less privileged Dalit in different spheres of Indian society. Nonetheless, the interviews carried out with Dalit faculty members in this study reveal – although perhaps still not in full – very pressing experiences of injustice within the university environment. The respondents shared their sense of feeling undervalued, and at times witnessing their authority and influence go unrecognised or challenged within an academic context. In short, their situation (as explored in this chapter) remains unsatisfactory.

Kamble (2002) believes that “in everyday life situations Dalits are subjected to [...] humiliation and frustrations” (p. 172). Although the Quota policy advocates a form of distributive justice, and assists some high-achieving Dalits in obtaining faculty positions at the University of Shah Jahan, the principle of equality is in reality often negated, with Dalit faculty members bearing the brunt of non-Dalit prejudice; while there is some attempt at distributive justice, little is done in terms of cultural forms of social justice such as respect and recognition. As Dr. Ambedkar said: “We have in India a society in which there are principles based on graded inequality, which means elevation of some and degradation for others” (cited in Guru, 2002, p. 49). Such principles of injustice greatly hinder the efforts made by Dalits to achieve justice, dignity and self-respect; this is certainly the case for Dalit faculty members at the University of Shah Jahan, to whom equality of treatment is denied (Mander, 2002).

Chapter 6

Dalit Students' Perceptions of the Quota Policy and their Experiences at the University of Shah Jahan

“Dalit students’ experiences in premier universities require much closer investigation, for “they have been overlooked in these institutes [...] the efforts to address this issue have been neglected for many years.” (Jaffrelot, 2003, p. 217)

6. Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of Dalit students’ overall perceptions of the role of the Quota System today, a policy initially designed to promote their access to and participation in higher education. Specifically, the chapter explores their views and perceptions of the Quota scholarships provided to enable Dalit individuals to take higher education degrees in elite universities. In addition, this chapter examines the complexities of Dalit students' perceptions and responses to life in an elite university environment. The intention of this chapter is to explore Dalit students' lived experiences in a prestigious higher education environment, and to offer a nuanced analysis of these processes with reference to the University of Shah Jahan.

This chapter addresses the following research questions:

- What kinds of experiences do Dalit students (as learners) encounter within an elite university, in both formal and informal settings?
- What is the role of the government’s Quota System policy in helping the Dalit to gain access to higher education?

In this chapter, I will concentrate on interview data comprising responses from 15 student participants (10 Dalit males, 3 Dalit females, and 2 non-Dalit males – see Table 1 and Table 2) drawn from my set of semi-structured interviews. Although a total of 44 students (25 Dalit males, 15 Dalit females and 4 non-Dalit students) were interviewed, this chapter deploys interview extracts from 15 student participants (10 Dalit males, 3 Dalit females, and 2 non-Dalit students). Only 3 extracts taken from interviews with Dalit female students are used in this chapter. This is due to the fact that the subsequent chapter (Chapter 7) will engage more specifically with Dalit female respondents in order to detail their experiences as students in the university environment.

The respondents whose interviews have been selected for this research study are key informants in terms of explaining the intricacies of their experiences, and the many dichotomies they encounter as Dalit students. While all of the Dalit students I interviewed provided accounts similar to the views detailed in this chapter, the selected responses best exemplify the range of experiences that arose from coding and analysing the data set.

The chapter is organised around six dominant themes that emerged from the coding and analysis of the data, as follows:

- The role of the Quota policy
- Applications and admissions
- In-class experiences
- Extra-curricular experiences
- Merit and social justice
- Formal and informal experiences

Each theme is explored, and its structural and ideological foundation addressed. Particular attention is paid to the educational marginalisation of Dalit students, usually premised upon their caste affiliation.

Table 1: Dalit Students Interviewed

Name (pseudonym)	University Department and Subject Status	Gender and Quota Status
1) Yogesh	Department of Sociology (<i>low-status subject</i>)	Quota Dalit male (partial Quota scholarship)
2) Rajeev	Department of Sociology (<i>low-status subject</i>)	Quota Dalit male (partial Quota scholarship)
3) Deepak	Department of History (<i>low-status subject</i>)	Quota Dalit male (partial Quota scholarship)
4) Vinod	Department of Law (<i>medium-status subject</i>)	Quota Dalit male (partial Quota scholarship)
5) Pankaj	Department of Chemistry (<i>high-status subject</i>)	Quota Dalit male (full Quota scholarship)
6) Chetan	Department of Psychology (<i>low-status subject</i>)	Quota Dalit male (partial Quota scholarship)
7) Anand	Department of Management (<i>medium-status subject</i>)	Creamy-layer Dalit male (family-funded)
8) Ashok	Department of Management (<i>medium-status subject</i>)	Creamy-layer Dalit male (family-funded)
9) Prakash	Department of History (<i>low-status subject</i>)	Quota Dalit male (partial Quota scholarship)
10) Rajesh	Department of Engineering (<i>high-status subject</i>)	Creamy-layer Dalit male (family-funded)
11) Vaishali	Department of Law (<i>medium-status subject</i>)	Quota Dalit female (full Quota scholarship)
12) Lalita	Department of Sociology (<i>low-status subject</i>)	Quota Dalit female (partial Quota scholarship)

13) Sheela	Department of Engineering (<i>high-status subject</i>)	Creamy-layer Dalit female(family-funded)
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Table 2: Non-Dalit Students Interviewed

Name (pseudonym)	University Department and Subject Status	Gender and Quota Status
1) Rahul	Department of Medicine (<i>high-status subject</i>)	Non-Dalit male (Quota status – not applicable)
2) Dilip	Department of Engineering (<i>high-status subject</i>)	Non-Dalit male (Quota status – not applicable)

Of the 13 Dalit respondents, 2 (Pankaj and Vaishali) receive full Quota scholarships (which include tuition, accommodation, and a monthly stipend). 7 Dalit students (Yogesh, Rajeev, Deepak, Chetan, Vinod, Prakash and Lalita) are on partial Quota scholarships (which include hostel accommodation and food for students undertaking two-year Master's degrees). The remaining 4 Dalit respondents (Rajesh, Sheela, Ashok and Anand) receive funding from their families, who belong to the professional 'creamy layer' of Dalit (Jenkins, 2003; Guru & Chakravarty, 2005; Rana, 2008, p. 189).

The Dalit students interviewed as part of this study were educated in government city schools, government colleges, or private colleges in the city. While most Dalit respondents were born, bred and schooled in the city, a very few had migrated from rural regions with their families, and attended government schools and colleges in the city. The non-Dalit respondents (Rahul and Dilip) whose interviews inform this chapter come from affluent homes, and were educated in private grammar schools and colleges around the city.

6.1 Perceptions of the Quota System

6.1.1 ‘Tensions’ – Students' Views and Experiences of the Quota Policy

This section examines the perceptions and experiences of Dalit students regarding the Quota System and its role in increasing Dalit access to and participation in higher education. More precisely, this section will make use of these responses to examine the effects of the Quota policy and the challenges it poses for Dalit university students.

6.1.1.1 Positive Support for the Quota Policy

As previously explained, the Quota policy makes provision for scholarship reservations to promote Dalit access to higher education. Vinod, a Dalit student in the Department of Law, highlighted the importance of the scholarships for his own academic progress:

The Quota scholarship scheme is very important. The scheme has definitely assisted me in meeting my tuition and accommodation fees. Since my family is financially challenged [...] this scheme is helping to ease the burden on my family. Higher education is not cheap [...] which is why I believe the scholarship scheme is important for students like me. (Interview – 03/07/09)

Vaishali, a Dalit female student and recipient of a Quota scholarship in the Department of Law, shared a similar view:

I would not be in higher studies if I had not received a Quota scholarship. Since the scholarship supports me in meeting my tuition and

accommodation fees [...] I can stay in a hostel and receive meals without being financially dependent on my family. (Interview – 10/07/09)

The Quota scholarship privileges have evidently produced some positive outcomes for individual Dalit students in terms of their access to higher education (Bob, 2009).

Ashok, a Dalit student in the Department of Management Studies, views the importance of the Quota System in more structural terms, for its role in aiding the Dalit community as a whole:

The Quota System should certainly exist. The Dalit have to reach a point of equality with the non-Dalit [...] [the scholarships] should not be removed [...] the Quota System provides opportunities for Dalit in higher education. (Interview – 06/07/09)

The Quota System appears to be a necessity for the development of the Dalit community, as it increases educational participation, thereby promoting the Dalits' social and economic progress. Bob (2009) argues that the educational sponsorship provided by the Quota programmes has been effective in raising self-esteem among members of the Dalit community, and has “encouraged them to be more aware of their legal rights” (p. 42). This awareness is evident in the responses of financially challenged Dalit individuals who support the Quota reservation system. For example, Chetan, a Dalit student in the Department of Psychology, believes that:

The Quota System is necessary because many Dalit come from poor homes [...] and they should have the benefits of scholarships and encouragement, and not be overlooked by the administration. (Interview – 24/07/09)

The Quota scheme provides grants to assist Dalit students who experience financial hardship. Rana (2008) believes that the position of Dalit individuals “has definitely improved because of overall educational facilities [...] accorded to these groups” (pp. 40-41). Guru and Chakravarty (2005) observe that the “state program of investing in the education of Dalits through provision of scholarships has met with relative success” (p. 138). However, despite the fact that some Dalit students have achieved success in higher education against all the odds, Mishra (2001) believes that there remain “inconsistencies in the educational development of Scheduled Castes (Dalit)” (p. 141). One principal inconsistency is that universities differ in reaching the targets for Dalit recruitment, in spite of available Quota seats (Chalam, 2007; Jogdand, 2007).

6.1.1.2 Dalit Students' Views of the Disadvantages of the Quota Policy

The positive contributions made by the Quota policy (such as scholarships, subsidised tuition fees, accommodation, etc.) may have been both “undermined and exaggerated” (Rajawat, 2004, p. 118). Rajawat (2004) argues that universities have “ignored and undermined the UGC’s [University Grants Commission’s] order” (p. 121) in failing to admit Dalit students according to the percentage set by the UGC. Furthermore, Mishra (2001) claims that although the Quota policy reserves 15% of the seats in good institutions for Dalit students, according to Sadangi (2008) “the figures show a dismal picture” (p. 25), as they are so frequently “muddled and misused” (Sadangi, 2008, p. 239).

In 2005, when the new Congress coalition government came into power in India, led by Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, the latter promised to implement the Quota policy more rigorously. However, this caused political mayhem in the form

of protests and “hunger strikes as well as threats of suicide” from non-Dalits (Chakravarty, 2008, p. 301).

Anand, a Dalit student in the Department of Management at the University of Shah Jahan, believes that the government and university administration alike hinder Dalit students in gaining access to higher education:

The Quota policy has set out rules for reserving seats for Dalit from the very beginning [...] but this has not been followed up. I mean [...] the requirement to reserve 15% of seats in higher education for the Dalit is only on paper; it is not vigorously implemented in practice. Those working in the higher levels of administration and management don't really care or bother [...] they are willing to bend rules to suit their needs [...] and then the Dalit suffer. (Interview - 31/08/09)

Rajawat (2004) claims that the policy of reserving university seats for Dalit students has not fully met expectations, due to the “absence of its proper and systematic implementation” (p. 136). Representatives of the dominant non-Dalit castes hold prominent, privileged ranks which “capitalize on State policy” (Shinde, 2005, p. 75). In Anand's view, the domination of the upper echelons of university administration and management by high-caste individuals reproduces social inequality.

Rajesh, a Dalit student in the Department of Engineering, adds that:

Officially, 15% of university seats are reserved for Dalit under the Quota System [...] but very few Dalit are admitted to the Engineering course. I mean, what is really happening with the 15% Quota? To me it seems clear that the admissions department is playing tricks by giving away Quota seats to non-Dalit students [...] then what about the Dalit students who have applied for admissions into Engineering through the Quota? [...] frankly

this tells you what the admissions department is up to. (Interview – 31/07/09)

Mathur (2005) reports that “caste associations [and] caste organizations [...] have entered into the educational field” in India (p. 62). This intervention has included attempts to establish separate educational institutions for the high-caste non-Dalit community, which have informally become known as ‘Brahmin’ (i.e. high-caste) universities (Mathur, 2005, quoting Sirisikar, 1965). Pankaj, a Dalit in the Department of Chemistry, described the lack of Dalit students on his course of study:

I don’t come across many Dalit students in my department. My Dalit friends and I understand very well that professional fields [such as science, engineering and technology] are doing a poor job in implementing the Quota seat reservations for Dalit candidates. I mean [...] the department is entirely dominated by non-Dalit students. Despite the Quota requirements [...] you come across very few Dalit students in my department [...] I guess that tells you where the 15% of Quota seats are being utilised. (Interview – 06/08/09)

These sorts of practices undercut the reform measures (i.e. the Quota policy) established for Dalits’ educational advancement (Sedwal & Kamat, 2008). The result has been a growing tendency towards Dalit marginalisation, evident in Pankaj's observations on the lack of Dalit students in his high-status department. These sorts of practices have had a negative impact on educational equity in terms of involving the Dalit population in educational progress in India.

6.1.1.3 Tensions between Dalit/non-Dalit around the Quota Policy

To some extent and in some ways, the Quota reservations have increased the rift between the Dalit and the non-Dalit. Pankaj, a Dalit student in the Department of Chemistry, explained the situation as follows:

Non-Dalit often assume that Dalit find it easy to get into further studies. I've come across non-Dalit who are explicitly derogatory [...] saying that we [Dalit] are on this course because of the Quota reservations [...] and that we are lucky to have government Quota scholarships to put us through.
(Interview – 06/08/09)

Pankaj's comments reveal the negative reactions he has faced from some non-Dalit fellow students. There appear to be few, if any, safeguards to protect Pankaj's rights in such situations. Kumar (2003) is of the opinion that, although members of university administration are aware of the needs of Dalit students, there is a general lack of "commitment and motivation for providing support" (p. 176).

It should be noted, however, that Pankaj's observations highlight a consistent point of concern about the Quota reservations policy: the, so-called "preferential treatment", according to some non-Dalit students, accorded by the Quota scholarship programme (D'Souza, 2009, p. 75). In other words, some non-Dalit students feel that the university places reserved under the Quota policy make Dalit individuals better able to gain access to higher education than their non-Dalit counterparts. Pankaj's report of the attitudes held by some non-Dalits in his chemistry class reflects the frustration felt by some non-Dalits about the Quota System's relaxation of admissions grants for Dalit applicants in science subjects. On the same topic, Rahul – a non-Dalit in the Medical department – argued that:

It is not easy just to enter a good university like this one. I've worked hard to secure very good results in order to enter the field of medicine [...] and many like me study equally hard or much harder to achieve the requisite grades for entry. Competition is stiff in medical science. It's frustrating that Dalit get in easily even with lower grades just because they have their reservations already secured and scholarships ready for them. (Interview – 21/08/09)

Rahul details the inequalities that he sees in the Quota policy. He observes that one of the effects of the Quota policy may be to ignore high-achieving non-Dalit students in favour of Dalit students of less academic merit. He feels that the prior reservation of seats for Dalit students may impede hard-working non-Dalit students in their efforts to obtain university places.

However, Pankaj (a Dalit student in the Chemistry Department) holds a different view, citing the scarcity of Dalit students on his course:

In my department there are hardly any Dalit students [...] I mean [...] most of them are in the arts, commerce and social science schools. I have a few friends who applied for sciences subjects with high grades but never got in. Although reservations and scholarships are available, [my friends] were informed that the Quota seats had all been taken by other Dalit [...] I mean [...] there are hardly any Dalit studying on my course [...] I don't understand how departments can do this and get away with it. (Interview – 06/08/09)

Pankaj's report suggests that, broadly speaking, the reservation policies have not helped Dalit students as much as they should have. Kahol (2004) believes that “university education is lacking in direction because of political pressures” (p. 72). Paswan and Jaideva (2003) are of the view that certain non-Dalit high-caste groups

“have gained the most benefit from the Quota scholarships set up for the Dalit.” (p. 54)

It seems that the scholarship scheme is generally considered useful by Dalit students, although as Mishra (2001) points out, “some Dalit students do not know about it” (p. 235). And while it has been beyond the scope of my study, there is a pressing need to examine more broadly the processes by which the Quota policy is advertised and circulated. However, Jogdand (2007) claims that the Quota System is “deviously manipulated by the dominant upper caste”; that is, the non-Dalit (p. 68). According to evidence gathered by researchers, non-Dalit officials often claim falsely that Quota scholarships are unavailable (Chakrabarty, 2008). Jaffrelot (2003) argues that such “prejudice hampers the entire reservation policy from the outset” (p. 92). According to D’Souza (2009), the government has failed in its responsibility to find solutions to these growing problems.

Ashok, a Dalit studying in the Department of Management, shared his frustration:

Scholarships have not been in full use for the Dalit community. Dalit applicants are often lied to by university administrators who say that all of the scholarship funding has been used up [...] that’s not true at all!
(Interview – 06/07/09)

Mishra (2001) claims that Dalit students are often denied educational support, and that there continues to be a “wide disparity between Dalit and non-Dalit at the level of education” (p. 21). Shinde (2004) is of the view that resistance to the Quota policy has escalated; it is currently estimated to have “benefited less than 1% of Dalits” (p. 74). Despite the official establishment of the Quota policy to reserve 15% of scholarships and fellowships in higher education, very few Dalit students have been able to access these privileges (Mishra, 2001).

6.2 Dalit Students' Experiences in the University of Shah Jahan

In this section, I will examine the Dalit respondents' opinions of their rapport and relationships with non-Dalit tutors.

6.2.1 Non-Dalit Tutors

Rajawat (2004) argues that the current trend in higher education in India is the “appointment of upper-caste teachers and administrators who teach in and administer the centres of learning” (p. 112-113). According to Pais (2007), university educators from upper castes show less interest in Dalit students' learning than that of their non-Dalit peers. This is not, at present, even a topic of academic or political discussion. Infringements of the legal and ethical values of teaching due to caste bias against Dalit students in classrooms have often gone unquestioned and unchallenged (Sheth, 1997; Nirula, 2005). Kamble (2002) claims that Dalit students frequently experience discrimination at the hands of “non-Dalit academics who challenge their (Dalit) caste identity in everyday social settings” (p. 195). Deepak, a Dalit student in the Department of History, shared such experiences, saying:

When I know the answer to the professor's question and have my hand up [...] it seems that someone else is always chosen to answer the question. Although I feel I'm the first one to have my hand up, it seems I'm often overlooked. (Interview – 04/09/09)

Jain (2005) believes that “in the Indian system of education what is lacking is intellectual sympathy and intuition on the part of the educators” (p. 33). Deepak, for instance, feels ignored and sidelined. Unfortunately, upper-caste professors usually keep quiet about the issue of caste discrimination against Dalit students. According

to Chalam (2007), high-caste Hindu educators are often inclined to look down on Dalit students, and some “consider them as uneducable” (p. 71). Such unhelpful attitudes reflect the prejudice that may result simply from caste affiliation (Mishra, 2001).

Furthermore, Kumar (2002) argues that if Dalit students are to receive some form of direction and support, then student guidance and counselling centres must be made an “integral part of the educational system at the college and university levels [...] with the sole purpose of giving them guidance” (p. 177). At Shah Jahan, however, most of the Dalit respondents in this study commented that university guidance and counselling centres offered little support to Dalit students, as a general rule. Apart from the counselling centre, some Dalit students seek support from their close friends, or small Dalit group(s) that they are sometimes part of. Although the counselling centre at Shah Jahan offers and is marked as a centre of support for students who are part of the university, for the Dalits it appears to offer less assistance, or none at all. Rajeev, a Dalit postgraduate in the Department of Sociology, shared his views on this topic:

Attitudes to Dalit have not changed. Even here in this university the habit of discrimination lingers on in some form or another. Whether counselling centres, administration, students or professors [...] their attitudes are all the same [...] no one can be bothered to try to solve the problems faced by Dalits. (Interview – 28/08/09)

Shah (2004) believes that “notions of hierarchy remain” strongly grounded within the higher education system (p. 8). Due to the prevalence of caste-biased attitudes in university administration, Dalit students may feel trepidation about seeking advice and/or counselling – a point that is returned to later in this thesis (see Chapter 7).

6.2.2 Non-Dalit Peers

Dalit students' interaction with their non-Dalit peers in everyday student life potentially forms a major part of their educational development. However, Dalit educational development can also be hindered when non-Dalits don't reciprocate. Although research (see Chapter 2) has highlighted practices which discriminate against Dalit students in institutions of learning, the following section will explore a more specific focus on the relationships between Dalit and non-Dalit individuals in the social and educational environment of a premier university today.

6.2.2.1 In classrooms

Rajesh, a Dalit in the Department of Engineering at the University of Shah Jahan, expressed his frustration at overhearing non-Dalit groups speak about him in a derogatory way:

Non-Dalit guys sit together in groups in class [...] sometimes behind me, and deliberately discuss the topic of Quota reservations for Dalit in premier institutes among themselves. Frankly, I get really angry when they go on and on about how we [the Dalit] are taking advantage of the Quota System [...] and how we are unfit for learning in 'Ivy League' institutes. (Interview – 31/07/09)

Many non-Dalits view the Quota System as a lingering threat that privileges Dalit access to higher education at the expense of non-Dalit applicants. Rajesh's report captures the experience of being set apart from, or locked out of, participation in university social life (Shinde, 2005). Similarly, Sheela – a Dalit female in the Engineering Department – explained that:

It's not easy being singled out for sarcasm by non-Dalit colleagues. I've had non-Dalit males and females come to me and ask why I opted to study engineering. Why not some other programme? [...] and why this university? I tell them why [...] and then they ask - were you admitted because of the Quota? Or sometimes they ask me what percentage [grade] I secured in my undergraduate degree [...] or which college I've studied in [...] and at times I've had someone correct my accent when speaking certain English words [...] they think I don't know, but their motives are clear to me. (Interview – 07/09/09)

Sheela's experience highlights the gulf that can exist between Dalit and non-Dalit students at the University of Shah Jahan. For Sheela, caste-related bias is a reality that she continues to encounter. D'Souza (2009) is of the view that "upper-caste students often treat Dalit according to caste divisions" (p. 75). Dalit individuals are categorised and marginalised, as in the case of Rajesh and Sheela, because of non-Dalit views on the 'unfairness' of Quota reservations. Such attitudes are one form of caste discrimination, which in turn maintains segregation by preventing Dalit students from participating fully in university life.

6.2.2.2 Outside classrooms: in hallways, and the broader social environment

Vinod, a Dalit in the Department of Law, shared one such experience of exclusion:

I can tell from non-Dalits' body language that I'm not welcome [...] I mean if I were to join a conversation with a group of non-Dalit colleagues in the corridor outside the class [...] I've often felt that I'm not welcome to join their group, or their conversation [...] it's not easy being left out in those moments. (Interview – 03/07/09)

Shinde (2005) believes that “certain groups [such as the Dalit] are being set apart or locked out of participation in social life” (p. 64). Experiences such as Vinod's indicate – at least in part – the discriminatory structures and processes that remain within the student body at the University of Shah Jahan.

Vaishali, a female Dalit student in the Department of Law, is dismayed by the way that non-Dalits sometimes behave towards Dalit students:

I get really frustrated with non-Dalit guys' making rude comments when I'm outside class. There is always some form of snickering by them when I pass by [...] though I don't see them teasing other non-Dalit girls in my class. It is pointless to complain about them to the staff as I know no action will be taken against them [...] I mean we only need to look around to realise that we [Dalit] are in the minority [...] they [non-Dalit] form the majority of the class. (Interview – 10/07/09)

Dalit representation is a major concern for Vaishali, and also for Vinod. Although there are a few Dalit students in the university's classrooms, their number is not proportional to that of non-Dalit students, who form the bulk of the class. The relatively minimal Dalit presence is a major concern. Vaishali's case highlights the issue of 'double' discrimination: both as a female and as a Dalit (Seenarine, 2004; Rana, 2008). Her experience as a female Dalit student in a good university has proven dismal. Moreover, her report of the attitudes held by many non-Dalit students and staff clearly confirms that a deep-rooted caste bias still exists in this prestigious university environment.

Male Dalit students also fall victim to sarcastic comments from non-Dalit colleagues. One such experience was shared by Anand, a Dalit postgraduate student in the Department of Management:

I've overheard non-Dalit colleagues speaking about me and my community [...] how we are a bunch of lazy people who thrive on the Quota System by gaining easy access to higher education. Some even hint that Dalit who are admitted to management and technology courses are depriving non-Dalit with much higher grades of their rightful opportunities. (Interview – 31/08/09)

This form of day-to-day harassment carried out by non-Dalit against Dalit students can be psychologically disabling. Integration and social cohesion may be challenged as one group is led by caste prejudices to undermine the other (Shinde, 2004). Such reactions may culminate in hostility, which affects the educational process itself (Shinde, 2004). Anand observed that many non-Dalit students consider their Dalit peers to be incapable of meeting the university's educational standards.

Deepak, a Dalit in the Department of History, called attention to the nature of caste discrimination and its influence on his life at university:

Discrimination, even among those who are educated, retains a strong foundation. The caste system is an integral part of our culture. Its long history of discrimination continues. One might think that in a good university like this one, people wouldn't bother much about who is who. But in reality that is not the case. People are concerned about who they are with. (Interview – 04/09/09)

Deepak observes that even “good universit[ies]” do not protect students from caste discrimination. In his view, it is evident that this premier university is yet another arena in which the practice of caste division is perpetuated. The university environment reinforces and maintains a divide between Dalit and non-Dalit, with the latter engaging in patterns of indifference and exclusion (Dhawan, 2005).

According to Deepak's account, the discriminatory treatment of the Dalit by their non-Dalit colleagues cultivates and maintains caste schism on many levels. In short, the possibility of social cohesion between non-Dalit and Dalit communities is minimised by the prejudice that many of the former hold and practise against the latter (Shinde, 2004). Rajeev, a Dalit student in the Department of Sociology, described similar experiences. He has encountered biased attitudes from non-Dalit students even outside the classroom:

The issue of caste prevails in this university: if another person learns of your caste, especially as a Dalit, they start to avoid you. One such example is when I went to the family home of a non-Dalit student: they were very nice to me at the beginning, but when they learned of my caste they began gradually to avoid me, which made me uncomfortable. (Interview – 28/08/09)

The inequality and exclusionary practices faced by Rajeev were linked to caste, with a non-Dalit family discriminating against him on the basis of his membership of the Dalit community. Disassociation of oneself (non-Dalit) from the 'other' (Dalit) is a classic form of direct discrimination (Shinde, 2004). One might wonder whether the rule of law applies in such a case. However, Pankaj, a Dalit in the Department of Chemistry, suggested otherwise:

No! The laws aren't put into practice and certainly don't get enforced or audited rigorously. Dalit continue to face prejudice at the hands of non-Dalit, whether inside or outside the university environment. (Interview – 06/08/09)

Keane (2007) believes that the system of law in India "has failed to adequately ameliorate the conditions of the Scheduled Castes [Dalit]" (p. 239). Constitutional law is insufficient to solve the problems of prejudice associated with caste bias, at

least in part because several high-caste (non-Dalit) individuals are closely affiliated with the police, district administration and even state government (Keane, 2007). For example, D'Souza (2009) claims that “the conviction rate for caste atrocities and discrimination is extremely low” (p. 61). Moreover, Kumar (2002) states that, whenever members of the high-caste non-Dalit community are at the “helm of affairs in educational institutions, they change the rules and regulations to suit or uphold or benefit a particular section of the students” (p. 177). Many of the Dalit students feel that injustices prevail against them. Keane (2007) is of the overall opinion that “there is a general lack of priority given to Dalit issues” (p. 254), and that the Indian Constitution certainly falls short of upholding the higher educational needs of the Dalit.

6.2.2.3 Positive rapport with non-Dalit individuals

Although most of the Dalit students interviewed in this study have experienced some form of bias from non-Dalit students in the university environment, the situation is not entirely negative. Despite the substantial evidence of discrimination against Dalit students, it is important to note that some improvements have been acknowledged – at least up to a point. For example, Dilip, a non-Dalit from the Engineering department, commented on his rapport with one of his class colleagues, who is a Dalit:

I chat and discuss things with my Dalit colleague both in and outside class. He is a nice guy and bright too. I've never thought about his caste affiliation [...] and quite frankly it does not even matter to me at this point. (Interview – 17/09/09)

Such evidence seems to suggest that friendships across caste boundaries are possible without any sense of caste demarcation. Although previous interview excerpts indicate a tendency for Dalit students to be isolated from their non-Dalit peers, perhaps this case suggests otherwise.

Yogesh, a Dalit in the Department of Sociology, shared a somewhat similar experience of the attitudes held by his non-Dalit tutors in higher education:

At this stage of my education I have not experienced biased treatment from my non-Dalit tutors. My non-Dalit tutors have shown respect to me despite my caste background. (Interview – 25/09/09)

As previously mentioned, many of the Dalit respondents in this study reported having faced negative attitudes from their class tutors. Evidently, then, lecturers' attitudes are to some extent responsible for increasing the isolation of Dalit students (Chalam, 2007). However, far from segregation or isolation, Yogesh has been "shown respect" by his tutors. This runs counter to the reports of the other Dalit respondents, all of whom have experienced segregation. Although Yogesh's experience suggests that tensions between non-Dalit and Dalit individuals in the university environment may be minimal or non-existent for some individuals, caste discrimination can take a more subtle form. It is crucial to bear in mind that although non-Dalit students may unexpectedly prove supportive, they can also – as previously seen – behave divisively and promote segregation (Jain, 2005; Mishra, 2001).

6.2.3 University Admissions

Dhawan (2005) believes that “due to the lack of earlier studies [on Dalit university admissions] the situation warrants [...] additional research in the [...] recruitment area”, especially with regard to Dalit postgraduate admissions (p. 136). Empirical work is needed in order to ensure that the challenges faced by Dalit students in higher education are fully understood and realised (Mathur, 2005).

The authority of universities in India is recognised and “ratified by central or state legislature” (Das, 2008, p. 75); they are intended to function as autonomous institutions. Mathur (2005) believes that the “management may thus be thought of as involving two major elements, planning and control” (p. 147). Das (2008) highlights the fact that universities’ “internal management establishes authorities [...] appoints [its own] personnel” (p. 76). Chakrabarty (2008) adds that the appointment of managers is conducted by means of caste calculation, such that candidates are “nominated according to a caste ratio [...] and patronage is tilted in favour of the caste support base” (p. 67). It may be the case, therefore, that caste bias distorts the work of these institutions. In the following section, I will look at the university applications process, along with the admissions procedures (including interviews) involved in recruiting Dalit students to higher education.

6.2.3.1 Application process

In the case of the University of Shah Jahan, the postgraduate application route involves a form-filling process for all applicants. However, it is important to note that all Dalit applicants are required, in addition, to tick a box marked ‘Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribes’, designating their caste affiliation as Dalit. Critics of this

system argue that such procedures may work to restrict Dalit participation in higher education (Jogdand, 2007). As Vinod, a Dalit in the Law department, pointed out:

In the application process we have to indicate that we are Scheduled Caste [Dalit]. I believe that in the admissions process we are thus easily singled out [...] this way only a few Dalit are selected, even if there are Quota seats available for more Dalit students to be admitted onto the course. (Interview – 03/07/09)

The process of student selection is another area in which caste prejudice may be at play. Vinod observes that admissions officials in the University of Shah Jahan can separate Dalit from non-Dalit admission forms using the Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) tick-boxes, and would then find it easy to distort the selection process by minimising Dalit student intake and maximising non-Dalit admissions. Similarly, Anand (a Dalit in the Department of Management) believes that the selection process for his programme could be biased toward non-Dalit applicants:

I really feel that the application process is a very convenient way to find out who is a Dalit and who isn't. All application forms require you to indicate clearly whether you are SC [Scheduled Caste/Dalit] or ST [Scheduled Tribe]. So you see [...] if a person is a Dalit they must tick the box. I did it. Dalit applicants tick the box on the admission form [...] but we don't know whether we are successful in the admissions process in spite of the available government Quota seats [...] frankly [...] I don't see many Dalit studying on my course. (Interview – 31/08/09)

In Anand's view, such a sophisticated form of discrimination enables the sidelining of Dalit applicants, whose entry to the portals of higher learning is thus thwarted. Indeed, D'Souza (2009) claims that the skewed processes of selection

have worked against the “effective representation, inclusion and participation” of Dalit candidates studying on university courses in India (p. 89).

6.2.3.2 Interviews

After considerable scrutiny as part of the admissions process, successful Dalit applicants are selected for interview. According to my Dalit respondents, the questions posed by the interviewing committee are at times directly personal and non-academic, which may cause discomfort to candidates. One such experience was shared by Pankaj, a Dalit in the Chemistry department of the University of Shah Jahan:

Getting through the interviews is a difficult task. I’m aware of what is involved in the interview process. My view is that [...] technically, academic admissions interviews don’t include personal questions about family, religious background or place of residence. But I was asked personal questions about my family members [...] where they are from [...] family income [...] what kind of area I live in, etc. And the worst part is that the faculty members asking these questions were high-caste non-Dalit. (Interview – 06/08/09)

Such inappropriate behaviour raises questions about biases that may prevail in the interview selection process. D’Souza (2009) claims that caste inequities in academic institutions “inadvertently affect the admissions procedure” and thereby ensure the continued exclusion of the Dalit community (p. 73). He argues that the “government has largely failed in overcoming such a situation” (p. 74). Lalitha, a Dalit female student in the Department of Sociology, shared a somewhat similar experience:

I was asked about my family members [...] what village they were originally from [...] the professional status of family members [...] religious affiliation [...] whether I am a convert or non-convert [...] I mean who asks such questions in an interview? [...] I mean to a certain degree I am willing to share who I am [...] but personal stuff [...] not really! I expected that the interview would engage my views on the course and subject I've chosen to study. (Interview – 03/08/09)

Unfortunately, this practice of asking personal questions about family, class, religion, etc., was experienced by a few of my Dalit respondents.

6.2.3.3 Admissions procedure

The remainder of the university's admissions procedure is similarly 'difficult' for Dalit candidates at Shah Jahan. Dhawan (2005) believes that the faculty involved in the admissions process often leave "little scope or flexibility for admitting Dalit to study programmes" (p. 132). Rajesh, a Dalit in the Engineering department at the University of Shah Jahan, believes that Dalit candidates are denied admission in spite of the availability of Quota seats. He remarked as follows:

The selection process is very tricky in the professional fields [including medicine, engineering and technology]. I know of Dalit students who have purposely not been selected, with their seats given instead to non-Dalit students. Although, according to the Constitution, Quota seats in these professional fields need to be filled by Dalit [...] non-Dalit take the seats and deserving Dalits are told 'Sorry! The reservations are now full' [...] I believe that this is unfair to them [Dalit applicants]. (Interview – 31/07/09)

Many of the Dalit students interviewed in this study have highlighted similar trends in the behaviour of the university's admissions department. Mishra (2001) emphasises that "the problem of uneven access, quantity, quality and relevance remains" (p. 21). Rajesh's experience reveals that the admissions board is failing to meet its obligation to fill all of the Quota seats available for Dalit students. Chalam (2007) claims that the attitudes of the selection committee, "most of whom are [...] high-caste Dalit", play a "dominant role" (p. 68).

Chetan, a Dalit student in the Department of Psychology at the University of Shah Jahan, believes that:

University management and administration are usually controlled by high-caste Brahmins who maintain caste differences. (Interview – 24/07/09)

It is evident to Chetan that the institute's administration and management have consistently restricted Dalit admissions. D'Souza (2009) believes that "discrimination against Dalit students in the admissions process is in vogue, despite legal reservations" (p. 76). Although the Indian government's 1986 National Policy on Education stressed the need to enforce "specific goals of management, participation, professionalisation, autonomy and accountability" (Dhawan, 2005, p. 136), the situation at the University of Shah Jahan, as reported by my Dalit respondents, appears to be one of neglect, consistently failing to implement the Quota policy adequately. Das (2008) is of the view that "unclear objectives and requirements set by the administration have become a growing concern" for Dalit students (p. 71). Rajeev, a Dalit student in the Department of Sociology, believes that departmental management 'plots' to deny admission to Dalit applicants. He said:

Until today, university management has denied Dalits proper admittance into educational institutions. The administration is dominated by high-caste

Hindus. And there are a number of cases in which Dalits have been prevented from gaining access to certain courses. (Interview – 28/08/09)

Das (2008) claims that internal university management often appoints its own personnel (i.e. non-Dalit administrators), and “refrain[s] from monitoring staff performance – whether it be teaching or administration” (p. 76). This supports Das's (2008) argument that “universities can do whatever they wish as long it conforms to the formal or informal desires of those in political or bureaucratic authority” (p. 80) – and this practice is somewhat similar to that of the bureaucratic management at Shah Jahan. Das (2008) questions universities’ “performance, responsibility and accountability in the student selection process” (p. 96), as corroborated by Rajeev’s experience of minimal Dalit admissions to the University of Shah Jahan. The problems associated with Dalit admissions are exacerbated by the issue of ‘meritocratic’ student selection in relation to professional fields of study, which will be explored in the subsequent section.

6.2.4 Merit

6.2.4.1 Meritocratic selection

This section examines the attitudes of both Dalit and non-Dalit respondents towards the merit-based criteria for admission to professional courses.

Ashok, a Dalit in the Department of Management, commented that:

We have to confront sarcasm from non-Dalit who allege that due to the Quota System we gain admission with lower grades than those of deserving non-Dalit students who do not obtain university places. (Interview – 06/07/09)

Whenever the advancement of the lower castes has infringed upon the privileges of the higher castes, Kumar (2002) believes that there has been resistance and retribution from the latter: “the upliftment of the underprivileged [Dalit], is provoking resentment among the better-off [non-Dalit] sections” of Indian society (p. 48).

Dilip, a non-Dalit postgraduate in the Engineering department, spoke positively of the use of Quotas for Dalit admission, but would prefer them to be used only in the fields of liberal arts and social sciences, not higher-status engineering degrees and other professional courses:

Personally, I feel that the Quota System should increase its seats for Dalit on liberal arts, commerce and social science degree programmes. However, professional institutions offering degrees in technology, engineering and medicine should remove Quota seats, and admit students solely according to individual merit. I support merit-based admissions because I feel that in the competitive science fields, only individuals who have achieved the entry requirements for these professional programmes should be admitted. (Interview – 17/09/09)

Rahul, a non-Dalit medical student, commented on Dalit admissions to the professional fields. He believes that:

Most of them [Dalit] don't have the right base knowledge [to study these subjects]. This grounding is not something that can easily be taught. It's important to have an appropriate level of learning capacity. If a person gets 60% as opposed to 90%, they should not be admitted to medical school or engineering courses, because 60% is not enough to be a good doctor or engineer. Merit-based admissions are important in order to maintain educational standards. (Interview – 21/08/09)

Many non-Dalit students have expressed their support of “exclusively merit-based admissions” and their concerns about the Quota policy to India’s Supreme Court (Das, 2006, p. 255). The requirement that colleges and universities accommodate Dalit applicants with grants and benefits has caused anxiety and apprehension within the non-Dalit student community. Rahul, for example, argues that a “mediocre” entry grade for medicine is not acceptable, as it could ultimately undermine and lower the standards of the profession.

In consequence, the Quota policy faces a serious challenge from several senior high-caste politicians concerned about the entry of allegedly less well-qualified candidates from Dalit castes into higher education, and the general lowering of standards that it is feared will result (Das, 2006). In addition, these individuals express concern that the Quota reservations may have an adverse effect on the confidence and professional performance of those who have qualified on merit alone (Jogdand, 2007; Amman, 2008).

Dilip, a non-Dalit engineering student, added that:

Admission to professional degrees should be based on merit and not according to the number of seats allocated by the Quota policy. One should meet the entry requirements in order to study engineering. But if certain individuals [implication: the Dalit] are not qualified enough and are admitted onto the course [...] then I feel that the university is behaving unfairly towards deserving non-Dalit students. (Interview – 17/09/09)

The Quota policy was originally established as a strategy to bring about equality of access to higher education for the Dalit community. Yet it continues to face opposition from non-Dalit students. Due to weak government policy and implementation, the issue of merit continues to be invoked against the allocation of reserved seats for Dalit candidates in universities and professional colleges (Hooda,

2001). Rao (2007) claims that although Quota reservations are available in many government colleges and technical institutions, both the application and the admission of Dalits are “shrinking day by day as a matter of policy” (p. 157). Intolerance has increased with growing opposition to Quota reservations in higher education (Jogdand, 2007).

Anand, a Dalit in the Department of Management, shared his thoughts on this matter as follows:

I sometimes get really frustrated as to how Dalit are viewed in this university [...] and especially those on professional degree courses. Here [at the University of Shah Jahan] non-Dalits talk amongst themselves about us Dalits. They claim that I’m here not due to my educational achievement but as a result of the Quota reservations. (Interview – 31/08/09)

Reddy *et al.* (2004) believe that the attitudes confronted by Dalit students are based on the supposition that Dalit students have a lower “level of aptitude [and] less ‘merit’” (p. 125), and that they are therefore not eligible to study at premier universities like Shah Jahan. Kumar (2003) argues that competition in the higher educational environment in Indian society may give rise to “non-Dalit segments who may bring pernicious pressures on the existing institutions” (p. 63) if the admission of Dalits through Quota reservations continues. Non-Dalit candidates with higher grades may come to challenge and even alter the admissions process by demanding entry to universities based on their academic achievements and merit alone (Sedwal & Kamat, 2008).

Thus far, the Quota policy has certainly assisted Dalit recruitment to universities in India. Despite the arguments outlined above, it should be noted that if the issue of merit (as contested in the Supreme Court) is decided in favour of the non-Dalits, this could seriously limit the higher educational progress of the Dalit community in

the future (Das, 2006). The Dalits' situation is likely to worsen if the existing Quota reservations are substantially cut (i.e. reduced to less than the existing 15%), or removed permanently. In sum, therefore, the Quota (reservation) System is a vital part of ensuring the Dalits' socio-economic development and well-being in the future (Jogdand, 2007; Chalam, 2007). Perhaps what is needed is proper implementation, followed by effective enforcement and monitoring procedures.

6.2.4.2 Compensation

Rana (2008) claims that the “compensatory principle” of Quota reservations has “encouraged” the Dalit to pursue postgraduate degrees from universities across India (p. 48). Ashok, a Dalit in the Management department of the University of Shah Jahan, commented on the importance of ‘compensating’ Dalits in higher education:

As a result of the Quota System, Dalit are compensated [...] and through the Quota we have the opportunity to pursue further studies. I mean [...] even if a Dalit student has secured a good grade [...] but not as good as a grammar school-educated non-Dalit [...] they still have an opportunity to prove themselves in university learning due to the Quota benefits.
(Interview – 06/07/09)

The Quota policy has given Dalit students hope in terms of accessing higher education. Without the impetus of Quota scholarships, the movement of Dalit students (however limited) into higher studies and professional degrees would not have been possible (Das, 2008). The Quota policy has allowed the Dalit community to surmount the unequal odds that face it, and has built a pathway for some Dalit individuals to achieve their goals in an academic environment. However, although

the compensatory principle of the Quota System policy serves its end for the few Dalit students in Shah Jahan, injustices against Dalits in university education in India continue to go unchallenged.

6.2.4.3 Issues surrounding social justice in Shah Jahan

The international status and reputation of the University of Shah Jahan as an elite provider might lead one to expect more, or rather better, of its members – especially in light of what a university stands for (Chalam, 2007). This institution in particular would certainly be expected to offer a role model for the nation, and to take a leading role in tackling discrimination in India’s higher educational sector. Indeed, as mentioned earlier (in Chapter 4), the university itself makes the following commitments in its ‘University Pledge’:

Equality and respect should be promoted and practised towards both university teachers [i.e. faculty members] and students, from whom and with whom one gains both knowledge and understanding. [translated to English from the original Sanskrit of the Shah Jahan University Pledge].

In view of this pledge, one might not only expect better of the staff, but of the students too – especially as they are deemed to be among the ‘best’ in India. However, this does not seem to be the case in practice. With reference to the interview process, and in order to probe the issue of equality even further, the Dalit students participating in this study were asked whether or not they felt that the university consistently practised its pledge of ‘equality and respect’ for all. Most of the respondents were of the opinion that the university’s official commitment to equality for all was not followed up in practice. Yogesh, a Dalit student from the Sociology department, made the following remarks:

We are all familiar with our University Pledge. Equality and respect are such major aspects of it. But although the pledge has been made in writing, no one follows it in practice. Even if I were to complain to higher management about the discrimination I encounter [...] the question would be [...] would they listen? Probably not! I tried once [...] and was told by the management that I should discuss the matter with the Dalit student representative in the university, who would in turn bring it to the attention of university management [...] and then they would look into it. But nothing has been done as yet. So the thing is [...] they [i.e. the non-Dalit management] may listen to your issues, but no action will be taken. The fact is that Dalit voices invariably fall upon deaf ears [...] and this problem still persists in this university for most of us. (Interview – 25/09/09)

As we have seen, the various forms of discriminatory practices perpetrated by non-Dalits against Dalits remain all too common within India's universities in general, and the University of Shah Jahan in particular. Dalits continue to suffer the damaging effects of this discrimination. Although the Constitution of India has theoretically abolished discrimination against members of the Dalit community, D'Souza (2009) believes that the practice of treating the Dalits as 'untouchables' continues, "varying in extent and intensity from state to state" in India (p. 29). Pinto (2008) claims that "consciously or sub-consciously [...] administrators perpetuate through their interactions with Dalit students their own internalised caste values, thus posing a threat to Dalit achievement" (p. 184). This 'overt' "form of exclusion of Dalits [exists] even in urban areas" (D'Souza, 2009, p. 30). As this study shows, the Dalit are subjected to the same kinds of marginalisation even within university settings – including the University of Shah Jahan.

Moreover, the interview sessions revealed that complaints made by Dalit students to university authorities about discriminatory practices had at times been

discouraged by family members, due to concern about the possible repercussions for the students' future studies and family life. Chetan, a Dalit student from the Department of Management, offered a valuable example:

My family reminds me not to complain about my issues to the university authorities [...] as it will only rebound and make things worse for me [...] because my family would certainly not be able to cope with the setback of their son's being expelled from university. It is even possible [in an extreme case] that either I or my family would face death threats from certain right-wing caste groups! So it's not an easy situation for us Dalits, and there's no easy solution. (Interview – 24/07/09)

This point is worth noting. In this day and age, one may not expect social discrimination against Dalits to occur to such a degree and with such frequency – especially not within a premier university like Shah Jahan. Yet Chetan's account captures not only the predicament of Dalit university students today, but the intensity of discrimination they face. D'Souza (2009) corroborates Chetan's report, claiming that the "modern-day plight of Dalits includes [...] social exclusion and violence [...] and solutions are not forthcoming" (p. 38). This might well be attributed to the hegemony of non-Dalit (high-caste) individuals within Indian society, who ensure the exclusion of Dalits from all social and "economic gains [...] that allow empowerment" to the Dalit community (D' Souza, 2009, p. 32). Pinto (2002) adds that "the well-established dominant [non-Dalit] groups do not want their entrenched interests to suffer or experience a setback" (p. 188). Exclusionary behaviour allows certain non-Dalit high-caste groups to maintain their control within Indian society. Such behaviour has involved posing challenges of various kinds to the Quota System which aims to reserve seats for Dalit applicants in university education.

Prakash, a Dalit in the Department of History, offered his view on this issue:

What I have a problem with is [...] non-Dalit think we Dalit are not deserving, and that we gain admission by means of the reservations. But even Dalit with high grades don't often get admitted [...] and the seats go to the highest bidder who pays extra money to study a high-status subject in a professional field. Dalits do not have the financial capacity to do this [...] so non-Dalits get the benefits. And yet they complain. Quota reservations are the only way for Dalits to gain educational benefits. Remove the system and all will be lost. However, I feel that if the government really needs to remove the Quota, they should allow Dalit to be treated equally with non-Dalit. Then we won't need the Quota and we can achieve through our own merit. What I would like to see is [...] equal rights for all citizens. (Interview – 25/09/09)

Prakash places emphasis on the corruption, bribery and deliberate negligence ongoing within university administration and management to the detriment of the Dalits (Pais, 2007), as well as the financial constraints that limit Dalits' aspirations in higher education. Prakash also highlights an important concern: he argues for the need for social justice on behalf of the Dalits, and specifically the need for the Dalits to be treated equally in the university environment.

Lalitha, a Dalit in the Department of Sociology, commented rather sharply as follows:

I don't see any equality or justice in the way Dalits are treated here [i.e., Shah Jahan] by members of other castes. (Interview – 03/08/09)

Unfortunately, the constitutional provision for Dalits' educational development as envisioned during the 1950s has been far from a success. Indeed, Mishra (2001)

claims that India's constitutional guarantee of equal rights for all citizens has been "nothing but a handicap, instead of securing political justice for its citizens" (p. 20).

However, it is also important to bear in mind that the Quota System as a form of distributive justice accords many Dalits the privilege of securing higher education in premier universities (such as Shah Jahan), which in the decades before the inception of the Quota System was available only to the non-Dalit castes (Srinivas, 2008). The injustices enacted on Dalits are culturally bound, rooted in the caste culture of Indian society, and continue to hamper Dalits' higher educational development (Jogdand, 2007). Despite the fact that India's Constitution guarantees equality for all, the reality of student life for Dalits – as disclosed by both Prakash and Vaishali – is pervaded by discrimination and inequality.

6.3 Formal and Informal Encounters

In this section, I will examine the difficulties that arise due to attitudes exhibited towards Dalit students in their daily encounters with non-Dalit students. This section introduces the problems of exclusion and discrimination faced by Dalit individuals. The section examines these issues and focuses on caste prejudice as an ideological problem challenging the Quota measures for Dalit access to, and participation in, higher education.

6.3.1 Formal Experiences – the Quota Policy as Socially Just

India's Constitution renders discrimination against the Dalit community an offence punishable in a court of law (see Chapter 2 for further details of constitutional law as regards the Quota System policy). Universities across the Indian sub-continent

are required to adhere to the law that disallows any form of discriminatory act against minorities – especially the Dalit. However, while the statutes are clearly defined on paper, in practice the hierarchical caste system continues to prevail.

Although some literature may claim or suggest that the Dalit community is supported educationally, it is necessary to explore whether this is in fact the case – especially in a premier university environment which adds significantly to the life chances of its graduates, since “they [the Dalit] have been overlooked in these institutes” (Jafferelet, 2003, p. 217). A Dalit individual may enter a good university by means of the Quota System, and one might argue that he/she has thereby gained the benefits of a good education. But the underlying issue is whether that Dalit individual is able to participate fully as a student without encountering any form of resentment or bias within the university environment. The real question is whether the learning process and university social life are as smooth for that Dalit individual as for his/her non-Dalit peers. Are Dalit students confronted in practice with overt or covert (direct or indirect) discrimination, or perhaps isolation which forces them to socialise only with members of their own caste community, rather than a wider range including students of a higher, non-Dalit caste?

Vinod, a Dalit law student, shared his views as follows:

In reality [...] other castes don't readily accept Dalit friendship if they learn of your caste. Non-Dalit prefer to bond with other non-Dalit, rather than Dalit. (Interview – 03/07/09)

Shinde (2005) writes that “indirect discrimination due to the cumulative effects of historical discrimination [...] based on customary beliefs hinders the equal enjoyment of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights” (p. 69). In Vinod's case, discrimination is omnipresent in his university life, from a lack of recognition and covert discrimination to overt cultural injustice. Vinod's

experiences of friendship between students highlight the continued existence of intolerance according to caste-based religious beliefs and caste hierarchy (Kapoor, 2004).

Pankaj, a Dalit in the Department of Chemistry, shared a similar view. He commented that:

They [non-Dalit] will continue to be friends with you as long as they don't know of your caste affiliation. When they do [...] then things turn out to be different. (Interview – 06/08/09)

Pankaj's experience attests to the exclusionary effects of underlying prejudice against Dalits. Caste prejudices held by the dominant caste have for centuries worked to obstruct the educational mobility of Dalit individuals. It seems evident that many non-Dalit caste members seek actively to keep the Dalit community in a condition of 'backwardness' (Rajawat, 2004).

Chetan, a Dalit in the Department of Psychology, elaborated on this matter as follows:

Caste is the culture of our society. Children imbibe caste-based beliefs and traditions from the teaching of their families. (Interview – 24/07/09)

Paul (2007) claims, further, that "caste Hindus insist on enforcing inferiority on the Dalit in many ways" (p. 279). Privileged non-Dalit individuals support the mobilisation of their own caste, and are uninterested in or resistant to the upliftment of the Dalit community. Non-Dalit castes have become ever more culturally, socially and politically dominant in order to maintain their social and cultural pre-eminence in Indian society (Paul, 2007). Rajawat (2004) emphasises that "the notion of superiority and inferiority [...] is often perpetuated by upper-castes" (p.

112); and certainly Dalits continue to be treated unjustly by non-Dalits (D'Souza, 2009). Ashok, a Dalit in the Department of Management, expressed his resentment:

I do get really annoyed with some of these non-Dalit students. I can hear them whispering about me [...] or sometimes snickering when I walk past them. Sometimes I feel like telling them [...] 'Come on guys, it's a premier institute [...] act in a civilised way [...] and keep your prejudices to yourself!' (Interview – 06/07/09)

Anger is certainly one response to the situation. Non-Dalits' resentment of a system that has given some Dalits educational access has led in turn to the pigeon-holing of Dalit students as 'outsiders'. This has exacerbated divisions along caste lines, leading to segregation and, according to Kapoor (2004), widespread reluctance to improve intercultural understanding between Dalit and non-Dalit communities.

Although Ashok's experience highlights the glaring reality of prejudice encountered by Dalit students in the university arena, it is also important to address the incidences of 'caste confusion' that take place between non-Dalit and Dalit students. In other words, non-Dalits are not always able to identify Dalits – especially financially well-off creamy-layer Dalits, due to their sound educational background and their elevated social status (see Chapter 8). One such experience was shared by Anand, a creamy-layer Dalit in the Department of Management:

In view of my grammar-school education [...] and maybe my way of speaking [...] non-Dalits sometimes think I'm not Dalit, and don't identify me as one [...] and I sometimes get treated well. Although I should add that [...] on the face of it everything will seem nice [...] however, when they [non-Dalits] learn of your caste affiliation, then things turn out to be different [...] in those moments you are likely to encounter an attitude of exclusion from them [non-Dalits]. (Interview - 31/08/09)

Anand's "grammar-school education" signifies, in effect, that he is from a privileged socio-economic background; thus his caste identity might not appear to pose a problem. However, he still faces exclusionary behaviour from non-Dalits as soon as they learn of his affiliation to the Dalit caste. Non-Dalit students engage in patterns of indifference and exclusion, with an emphasis on avoidance (Tara, 2004; Dhawan, 2005). This has an extremely negative effect on Dalit students in the elite university setting, who are sometimes excluded both physically and socially from university activities, and at times prevented from participating meaningfully in the university environment.

6.3.2 Experiences of Exclusion

Chetan, a Dalit in the Psychology department, explained what it means to be a member of the Dalit caste:

The fact is we are Dalit [...] one cannot overlook that part of us. We have to confront our 'Dalitness' [...] and this means being prepared to confront the cultural hurdles that come our way. (Interview – 24/07/09)

Reddy (2004) is of the view that the image of "inferiority gives the Dalit a feeling of diffidence, impurity, and low self-esteem" (p. 108). An inferiority complex that may result from their social background can act as an obstacle to some Dalits' success and achievement (Rajawat, 2004). In contrast, Mendelsohn and Vicziany (1998) believe that "Dalit have undergone a profound change in their view of themselves and the society around them" (p. 1). Dalit students are forced to deal with casteism, as upper-caste non-Dalit students often discriminate against their Dalit peers on the basis of caste (D'Souza, 2009). My respondents did not seem to demonstrate 'inferiority complexes'. Rather, they were angry at the continual

exclusion they experienced. Prakash, a Dalit in the History department of the University of Shah Jahan, argued that there is only one way to escape caste-based mistreatment:

If a Dalit student graduates in a professional field [i.e., engineering, medicine, law, etc.] from this university, they have a better chance of getting a good job and improving their economic status. I believe that caste today is very much linked to one's economic status [...] I mean [...] if you have a high salary in a professional field you can escape discrimination [...] because if a Dalit is affluent financially then it is more convenient for that person in social terms. (Interview – 25/09/09)

Although caste discrimination is still rampant in education in India (Chalam, 2007), Prakash proposes that acquiring professional degrees from India's 'Ivy League University' could help the Dalit to gain status both socially and economically. In fact, this educational leverage offers the possibility of defying India's ancient, caste-delimited social order (Keane, 2007).

However, Vinod (a Dalit respondent in the Department of Law) disagreed with Prakash's view that affluence and financial stability offer a means for Dalit individuals to escape caste discrimination. Vinod argued that caste connection remains of considerable importance, even in today's world:

Non-Dalit in many ways try to maintain caste differences. Caste affiliation, [...] like [...] who belongs to which caste, matters. From the area of the city in which one resides, to what room-mates one has in the university hostel, and what caste one's friends are [...] all of these things matter, even today. In all of this the Dalit person is the victim [...] because that person does not fit in with anyone except other Dalit. Believe me [...] what caste one belongs to matters in this society because everyone wants to know what

family background you come from [...] and based upon that they know how to treat you. (Interview – 03/07/09)

6.4 Discussion and Conclusion

Critics may argue that the Quota policy has contributed to the development of the Dalit minority, facilitating their progress in both social and economic terms. Indeed, my interviews with Dalit students and faculty at the University of Shah Jahan indicate that this is, to some extent, true. It may even be argued that the 15% reservation of places in university education gives the Dalit minority an advantage over other communities such as Muslim, Christian and Sikh minorities, as well as other ‘lower’-castes who do not benefit from the Quota scheme. However, it is crucial to recognise that no other minority communities suffer the stigma of ‘untouchability’ that is borne by the Dalits (Paswan, 2002). For instance, admission forms for a university place, or for a job at a university, require Dalit candidates to specify their caste affiliation as either Scheduled Caste (SC) or Scheduled Tribe (ST). As a result, therefore, Dalits are stigmatised and marginalised from the very outset of the process of application. Sadangi (2008) believes that, for Dalits, “stigma goes with them [...] wider society still stigmatises and oppresses them because they are Dalit” (p. 131).

Whether a Dalit individual converts to a religion such as Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, or Buddhism, or becomes a member of a church, masjid or temple, his/her family identity as a Dalit remains the same. The inescapable ‘Dalitness’ of these individuals leads to their exclusion by other (higher-caste) groups: they continue to be perceived as Dalit, no matter what religious group they belong to. As Sadangi (2008) observes, their “long history of exploitation does not come to an end when they adopt a non-casteist faith [...] Dalit of religions live in the same society ruled by caste values” (p. 131). Moreover, Sadangi (2008) points out that the “rising

incidence of atrocities against Dalit in Sikh villages is another dimension of the caste divide within the [Sikh] community” (p. 129). Even after religious conversion, Dalits have no guarantee of assistance or support from non-Dalit communities – whether Sikh, Muslim or Christian. Dalits are still viewed as ‘outcastes’ due to their indelible ‘Dalit identity’ (Pinto, 2008). In sum, then, D’Souza (2009) believes that the “present Dalit plight is primarily due to their historical [...] exclusion under the caste system” (p. 10).

This chapter also addresses the fact that although the Quota policy officially reserves 15% of places in higher education for Dalit applicants (S.C. – 8% and S.T. – 7%), not all of the 15% is available in practice. In fact, Dalit recruitment into universities is currently so low that their uptake does not even reach half of the 15% reservations (see Chapter 2). Due to corruption, bribery, misrepresentation and other failings of the system, many Dalit students do not receive the benefits of the Quota scheme designed specifically to further their progress. Even if some Dalits do enter prestigious universities (like Shah Jahan), we must still ask whether they can remain impervious to the many social injustices that await them in the university environment. Indeed, Pinto (2001) believes that there is “a definite design to keep the Dalits backward, [while] at the same time mouthing slogans of social justice” (p. 187).

The importance of the Quota policy lies in its provision of the legal right for a certain proportion of Dalit to access education at various levels, including university places and faculty membership. Article 46 of India's Constitution “provides [...] for their protection from social injustice and all forms of exploitation” (Thorat, 2009, p. 1). However, Thorat (2009) argues that although the Quota “strategy envisages and is directed at securing distributive justice” (p. 9), the Dalits' legal right to equality and justice lacks adequate enforcement, and might thus be considered somewhat empty. A right that is struggled over and contested, a right that is not supported or monitored, may be merely a rhetorical right. The

Dalits' constitutionally acknowledged right to social, economic and political justice and reform, for which Dr. Ambedkar fought for, for so many years, is still struggled over today in order to challenge “the historical denial of civil and cultural rights” (Thorat, 2009, p. 151) to the Dalit people – even in the higher educational setting.

In this chapter, I have argued that the Quota policy shows some characteristics of the distributive dimension of social justice. That is, the policy reflects a form of distributive justice in reserving 15% of university places for Dalit students/faculty, and upholds their legal right to access higher education. Beyond the initial appearance of rights/justice, however, the situation becomes more complicated. As I have argued, it is difficult to determine precisely how well the policy works in practice, because the process of monitoring the allocation of and access to Quota seats remains a major point of contention (Jogdand, 2007; Chalam, 2007). This difficulty derives from a lack of clarity regarding events prior to universities' admission decisions: how many Dalit students/faculty apply, and what proportion of their applications is rejected? The statistics for Dalit who are successful in obtaining places are likewise fragmented and incomplete. One ‘test’ of social justice, or at least an attempt to determine the equality of opportunity in practice, would be to monitor the statistics relating to this complex and fraught area of India's social life.

As previously mentioned, the social justice measures enshrined in India's Constitution affirm Dalits' right to access and participate in the university setting – including that of the University of Shah Jahan – as a means of promoting equality for the socially, economically and politically marginalised Dalit caste. However, even though members of the Dalit minority are legally able to become part of the university learning environment, they may still experience caste-based exclusion in one form or another after they have accepted a place. While both Dalit faculty members and Dalit students at the University of Shah Jahan benefit from the distributive justice enacted by the Quota policy, some nonetheless report instances

of discriminatory treatment from non-Dalits, in a version of the recognition/participation dilemma (Fraser, 1995). Despite forming part of the broader university environment as a result of the Quota policy's distributive justice measures, Dalit continue to experience various forms of marginalisation, including segregation from non-Dalit colleagues in the canteen and hostel dining areas, and ridicule from non-Dalit students/faculty. As a result, the Dalit are once again made to feel like 'untouchables'. Cultural and associational forms of injustice (Gewirtz, 2006) due to caste and ethnicity are enacted in non-Dalits' exclusion of and discrimination against the Dalits who have experienced a form of distributive justice. Additionally, to respond positively to the dimension of associational justice, for example, it would seem important to promote Dalit participation in a 'stronger' manner. One possible solution would be for Dalit to be given more power/authority in universities' board decisions, and perhaps to participate more directly in the governance of higher education. The Dalit faculty and students interviewed for this chapter would certainly prefer to have some form of Dalit representation in the upper levels of administration and management at the University of Shah Jahan.

However, the current lack of Dalit representation in the upper-level management and governing bodies of Shah Jahan (controlled, on the whole, by high-caste non-Dalits – members of the Brahmin caste), amply reflects the prevalence of exclusionary behaviour on the part of some influential non-Dalits towards the Dalit student minority. This cultural injustice is exacerbated by discrimination enacted by non-Dalit students and faculty against their non-Dalit colleagues. Moreover, Dalits' complaints to university officials usually fall upon deaf ears. The apathy exhibited by high-caste non-Dalit University administrators towards the Dalit is often ignored or disregarded, even by government bodies representing the Ministry of Education (Srinivas, 2008). In such cases, Dalits' experiences of injustice – both overt and covert – may raise questions as to the integrity of an elite institution that professes to stand for social justice and espouses the right to justice and equality for all

citizens. This ambivalence remains an ongoing challenge, even in contemporary urban Indian society (Chitkhara, 2002).

In order to illustrate the gravity of the Dalits' situation, awareness and understanding of their lived experiences is vital. One may assume that social injustices do not exist – either in theory or in practice – within a premier university, especially given this particular university's formal pledge. An elite university such as Shah Jahan might well be expected to resist these forms of discrimination, particularly in light of the official rules and laws (i.e. constitutional policies) that prohibit the practice of inequality towards individuals in general. One might also suppose that an academically brilliant, high-achieving student population from a well-to-do, educated background would acknowledge and follow the rules of the university, and avoid engaging in prejudicial behaviour towards any person. However, the responses provided by the Dalit participants in this study indicate that Dalit university students continue to face severe discrimination on a day-to-day basis. In short, their identity as Dalits has not ceased to hinder their educational progress (Pinto, 2008).

Dalit identity is a caste construct that Dalits cannot escape (Chalam, 2007). It is certainly possible to argue that the Dalits who contributed to my study are part of a premier university environment, and thus are much more fortunate than many other Dalits who experience far greater hardships; those living in rural areas, for example. What is at stake, however, is not whether one Dalit is more privileged (creamy-layer Dalit) or less privileged (Quota Dalit) than another. The real problem is that the caste identity of these students (whether privileged creamy layer or not) continues to exclude them in a variety of ways from the rest of the student population (Pinto, 2008). Even if they were to change their name or religion, they would still be perceived as Dalit – and stigmatised accordingly. In the case of higher learning institutions, Pinto (2001) argues that the “higher education system does a lot of violence to the culture of the Dalits [...] and until the whole question is

viewed from the perspective of culture, one cannot fully grasp the lack of success of Dalits in higher education” (p. 183).

In summary, this chapter highlights some claims made by the Dalit respondents about their experiences in the University of Shah Jahan. Dalit students and faculty alike emphasised the gravity of the injustices they face, and the frequency with which such encounters take place; clearly, therefore, more awareness is needed of the Dalits’ predicament within India’s prestigious universities. If their situation is not brought to the attention of scholars and authorities, both within and outside India, the habit of exclusion will persist, and official efforts to promote Dalits’ equality within India will prove, in reality, a lost cause (Pinto, 2001).

In light of the research questions posed at the beginning of this chapter, I have examined the themes that have emerged from coding and analysing the data obtained on the experiences of Dalit students in the University of Shah Jahan, as well as their views about the Quota policy – in theory and in practice. As evidenced in this chapter, Dalit students do indeed experience discrimination based on caste at this premier university. Their descriptions of their experiences offer some insight into the difficulties they encounter in their academic and social lives.

Social cohesion, even at the university level, is challenged by acts of marginalisation and segregation – as demonstrated by the respondents’ accounts of their own lived experiences. The underlying causes of marginalisation result in unique problems for Dalit students; and the experiences my respondents shared in interview reveal the difficulties (usually caste-related) that they continue to encounter. Caste identity significantly affects students’ treatment, even within an elite university setting.

Chapter 7

The Experience of Being a Female Dalit Student at the University of Shah Jahan

7. Introduction

In this chapter, I will examine the experiences of Dalit female students (both ‘creamy-layer’ and ‘Quota’) who have gained access to postgraduate studies at the University of Shah Jahan. The issues faced by Dalit women call for a separate and closer analysis. As Jogdand (1995) claims, “Dalit women have a distinct identity” (p. 111), both in view of their caste identity as ‘Dalit’ and their gender. Therefore, this chapter seeks to develop a grounded understanding of the situation of female Dalit students, and the various perceptions they hold of their personal, social and academic lives within an elite university environment.

In order to explore their situation, this chapter will address the following research questions:

- What kinds of experiences shape or affect female Dalit students (both ‘creamy-layer’ and ‘Quota’) in their access to and progression within the University of Shah Jahan?
- What is the role of the government’s Quota System policy in helping the Dalit to gain access to higher education?

This chapter will start by considering the experiences of female Dalit students and the issues that arise in relation to their caste and gender identity. The interview excerpts selected for this chapter are drawn from semi-structured interviews with

both Dalit and non-Dalit students at the University of Shah Jahan (see Table 1 and Table 2). For the research as a whole, 17 female students (15 Dalit and 2 non-Dalit) were interviewed. However, this chapter makes use of just 12 female interviewees (10 Dalit and 2 non-Dalit students), whose responses are judged to describe most accurately the sociological make-up of Dalit and non-Dalit women in Indian society, particularly in relation to their experiences in a premier institute of higher education. Although 15 female Dalit students shared important aspects of their experiences in the University of Shah Jahan, data from only 10 interviews were selected for inclusion in this chapter, as these respondents' views most powerfully exemplify the main coded themes that emerged from my analysis. Excerpts from the interviews with the 2 other Dalit female respondents (Vaishali and Lalitha) were utilised in the preceding chapter (Chapter 6), with the responses of Sheela (creamy layer) used in both Chapters 6 and 7 to contextualise the experiences of Dalit female students at Shah Jahan.

This chapter is structured around four major themes that arose from the coding and analysis of the data obtained. These themes are as follows:

- The status of women in Indian society
- Issues surrounding Dalit female students' access to and participation in the University of Shah Jahan
- Views and experiences of Dalit females within the learning environment at the University of Shah Jahan
- Inclusion and exclusion in the university setting

Table 1: Female Dalit Students Interviewed

Name (pseudonym)	University Department and Subject Status	Quota Status
1) Neeta	Department of Sociology (<i>low-status subject</i>)	Quota Dalit (partial Quota scholarship)
2) Diya	Department of Sociology (<i>low-status subject</i>)	Quota Dalit (partial Quota scholarship)
3) Seema	Department of History (<i>low-status subject</i>)	Quota Dalit (partial Quota scholarship)
4) Vijaya	Department of Psychology (<i>low-status subject</i>)	Creamy-layer (family-funded)
5) Vimal	Department of Law (<i>medium-status subject</i>)	Quota Dalit (partial Quota scholarship)
6) Sunita	Department of Law (<i>Medium Status subject</i>)	Creamy-layer Dalit (family-funded)
7) Meena	Department of Management Studies (<i>medium-status subject</i>)	Creamy-layer Dalit (family-funded)
8) Neelima	Department of Management (<i>medium-status subject</i>)	Creamy-layer Dalit (family-funded)
9) Deepika	Department of Chemistry (<i>high-status subject</i>)	Quota Dalit (full Quota scholarship)
10) Sheela	Department of Engineering (<i>high-status subject</i>)	Creamy-layer Dalit (family-funded)

Table 2: Female Non-Dalit Students Interviewed

Name (pseudonym)	University Department and Subject Status	Quota Status
1) Jyoti	Department of Medicine (<i>high-status subject</i>)	Non-Dalit (Quota status – not applicable)
2) Manisha	Department of Engineering (<i>high-status subject</i>)	Non-Dalit (Quota status – not applicable)

Of the 10 Dalit female respondents, 1 (Deepika, a Quota Dalit) receives a full Quota scholarship (which includes tuition, accommodation, and a monthly stipend). 4 Dalit female students (Neeta, Diya, Seema and Vimal, also Quota Dalits) are on partial Quota scholarships (which include hostel accommodation and food for students undertaking two-year Master’s degrees). The remaining 5 Dalit female respondents (Sheela, Neelima, Meena, Vijaya and Sunita) do not depend on Quota funding, but are funded by their families, who belong to the professional ‘creamy-layer’ Dalit community (Guru & Chakravarty, 2005; Rana, 2008, p. 189). (For more details of the ‘creamy layer’, refer to Chapter 8). Jyoti and Manisha, the non-Dalit female students also interviewed for this study, hail from affluent homes.

7.1 The Status of Women in Indian Society

In this section, I will start by exploring the gendered inequities that still exist for Indian women as part of the country’s cultural and societal norms. Across many nations and societies, women have encountered – and continue to encounter – male domination and inequality in various spheres of life (Jogdand, 1995). However, while gender inequity persists in many societies across the globe, some women have been successful in achieving at least the right to equality (Seenarine, 2004; Chalam, 2007). In the Constitution of India, for instance, “clause (3) of Article 15”

empowers the state to make special and “equal provision for women” (Prasad, 2005, p. 169). However, Sharma and Sharma (2004) claim that “unlike [women in] Western nations, Indian women are denied equal opportunities [...] in many spheres of life” (p. 53). Mandal (2003) believes that the low status of women in India should be examined in the “context of the treatment they get from the male population”, as part of the prevailing patriarchal system (p. 68). According to patriarchal ideology, for instance, “in India parents don’t easily welcome a female child” (Mandal, 2003, p. 70).

Chakravarti (2008) reports that “analysts of gender stratification in India have [...] tried to give a historical basis to female subordination in India [...] outlining the development of patriarchy/ies” (p. 25). Patriarchal norms have taken for granted the subordinate status of Indian women in ways that go largely unquestioned. Mandal (2003) reflects on the ways in which many early politico-social thinkers and philosophers have “contributed to the degradation of women in society” (p. 66). These include the ancient law-maker Manu, who is recorded to have stated that “a woman has no [...] identity of her own, except that which comes to her through a man”. Manu’s law prescribes the following code:

In childhood a female must be subject to her father,
In youth to her husband,
When her lord is dead, to her sons;
A woman must never be independent.
(cited in D’Souza, 2009, p. 64)

The right to equal status was not granted to women “according to the ancient Hindu Law or other religious laws in India” (Mandal, 2003, p. 38). According to religious obligations, which evolved over several centuries, women were placed in subordination to men. This perspective has continued to impact adversely on the legitimate rights of women in India. Although the status of women in India today is

better than in previous decades, Prasad (2005) opines that the liberation of women in itself is not sufficient, “due to the patriarchal structure [...] under which women’s oppression does not end” (p. 9).

Usmani (2004) is of the view that “the Indian world is a male world with an ambivalent attitude towards females” (p. 83). D’Souza (2009) agrees, describing India as “largely male-centric in practice” (p. 68). In addition, Paswan and Jaideva (2004) believes that the situation for Dalit women in India is an “extremely volatile and a sensitive one” (p. 37). As D’Souza points out, this dynamic “drives gender bias against women [...] and they continue to receive a lower status.” (p. 65). Women in Indian society, as Mandal (2003) understands it, are “deprived of many essential amenities and services which they need as [...] human rights”; yet society and its administration are not in the least worried about this deprivation (pp. 65-66). Aspects vital to women’s development and success, including “education, religious reform, cultural and customary change, etc.”, are limited, and indeed lacking altogether on many levels and in many places in India (Mandal, 2003, p. 66). In general terms, such limitations have discouraged and disadvantaged all women of all castes within Indian society.

7.1.1 Dalit Women’s Identity in Contemporary Indian Society

In considering the challenges most Indian women encounter in a society governed by caste and patriarchal codes, D’Souza (2009) claims that the position of “the ‘Dalit woman’ under such social circumstances is much worse” (p. 65), as she is denied the “opportunity for further development” (Mandal, 2003, p. 67). Dalit females are singled out as the “most vulnerable” (Prasad, 2006, p. 168). In Prasad’s (2006) view, caste identity “alienates Dalit females by condemning them to live a stigmatized life” (p. 171). Both caste and gender, therefore, contribute to the

exclusion and/or marginalisation of a particular section of Indian society – Dalit women.

The marginalisation of Dalit females is associated with what Gewirtz (2002) calls considerable “cultural injustices” (p. 149) relating to ethnicity, tradition, language, religion and so on. As Mandal (2003) argues, such injustices are perpetuated by the “religious dicta, customs and traditions” of Indian society (p. 68). Even Dalit women living in urban areas face subjugation and marginalisation in socio-economic, cultural and political terms, often leaving them untouched by social progress (Punalekar, 2003). D’Souza (2009) claims that “Dalit women, who account for almost 48 percent of the total Dalit population, suffer [...] discrimination” on many levels (p. 65). Nowadays, organised groups of Dalit women are seeking to combat casteism and sexism. Kannabiran (2008) believes that they are struggling “for a representation of their identity as ‘Women’ [...] to other socially dominant groups” within the country (pp. 336-337).

Subramaniam (2006) claims that the “caste-based discrimination, oppression, and violence inflicted upon Dalit women have not always been acknowledged and addressed” (p. 45). Rajawat (2004) contends that “caste and women’s problems cannot be separated in the Indian context” (p. 188).

With the caste system at its heart, Paswan and Jaideva (2004) claim that Hinduism accords Dalit women a very low status, making them “feel [...] they are inferior” (pp. 16-17) to males, who retain their dominant role within society (Kapadia, 2002). Bettcher (2007) considers such negative attitudes towards Dalit females to be expressed in the very structure of the Hindu religion, and “deeply bound with [caste-based] identity stereotypes [...] located within Indian cultural norms” (p. 13). In this study, it will therefore be necessary to define and understand the identity of Dalit women as compared to non-Dalit women in Indian society.

Jogdand (1995) believes that Dalit women's identity should be analysed within the broader framework of India's social structure. Kapadia (2002) considers identities to be "analytically complex to study because they are constructed and shifting, not fixed entities which can be negotiated, contested and reformulated as categories of representation" (p. 5). In India, people do identify themselves, and are identified, according to caste; this, Channa (2005) believes, "has become synonymous with human identity to the extent that most Indians cannot think of themselves as being apart from their castes" (p. 52). Paswan and Jaideva (2004) claim that many Dalit women have become victims of these traditional cultural practices because societal norms "reinforce caste culture" (p. 19). Caste culture has forced many Dalit women in Indian society to drop out of schools due to discrimination against them from upper-caste men and women alike. This all constitutes a significant challenge to Dalit women's self-esteem and sense of personal agency (Rajawat, 2004).

Most Dalit women suffer unimaginable oppression, which, as Mahey (2003) claims, is "not only for reasons of caste" (p. 151). A Dalit woman, as Paswan and Jaideva (2004) point out, is not only female, but "belongs to the lower caste [...]" and also to an economically lower class", and so is "thrice alienated" (p. 18). In other words, many Dalit women "are victims of caste, class and gender", especially in rural settings (Paswan and Jaideva, 2003, p. 18; Mahey, 2003).

In the case of Dalit women, both caste and class have "fixity as well as flexibility"; they are "intrinsically rooted together forming a caste-class nexus that existed from the British period" onwards (Paul, 2007, pp. 281-282). Together, as Sadangi (2008) observes, caste and class can limit "Dalit women's choices and opportunities [...]" placing them on the bottom in all development indicators" (p. 217). Upper-caste, non-Dalit individuals often make use of the idiom of caste to maintain their privileges, and to "retain their economically and politically dominant positions" (Paul, 2007, p. 281). Although a small percentage of Dalit women have achieved a higher status than others, many still fall prey to discrimination from upper-caste

individuals based on their caste and gender. Even educated non-Dalit Indian women are often less able to acquire high-status jobs or stable positions within the Indian bureaucracy, making economic betterment nearly impossible (Punalekar, 1995; Paul, 2007). Although women of upper-caste backgrounds also experience gender-based discrimination, Chakravarti (2008) argues that “Dalit women remain the most vulnerable section of women”, and that their oppression “far outweighs that of upper-caste women” (p. 160). Kannabiran (2008) agrees that the social suffering of Dalit women quite clearly “separates the ‘we’ [i.e. non-Dalit females] from the ‘not we’ [i.e. Dalit females alone]” in Indian society (p. 321).

Paswan and Jaideva (2004) recommend that Dalit females be studied as a “separate category”, “not [...] bracketed with other women”, because “their problems are different from those of the other [non-Dalit] women” (p. 27). The issues encountered by Dalit females as a result of their caste identity are not the same for women from other castes (Levin, 2009). Indeed, Chakravarti (2008) argues that the “upper-caste woman is invariably better placed than the lower-caste man” in terms of privileges (p. 141); she accesses more and better privileges than her Dalit counterparts, and is advantageously placed for “access to education and occupations” (Levin, 2009, p. 119). Mandal (2003) is of the opinion that women who belong to lower castes have to face many more “adversities in society than the women who are high-castes” (p. 68). Thus, the emancipation of Dalit females entails a “constant dual struggle as a ‘Dalit’ and as a ‘woman’” (Rajawat 2004, p. 188). Moreover, Rajawat (2004) believes that the status of Dalit women is in such a “pathetic condition that [...] the upper-caste women also exploit the lower-caste women” (p. 195).

As a result of this dismal situation, Channa (2005) claims, that Dalit men and women have increasingly become “bound by feelings of ‘shared oppression’” (p. 60, quoting Lorde, 1992, p. 50). During his research, Channa reports that he “never came across any low-caste [Dalit] man who believed that his [Dalit] woman was

morally degraded”. Moreover, he found, “most low-caste [Dalit] men treated their wives as equals” (p. 60). Yet Levin (2009) cites the model of threefold oppression formulated by Dalit feminists: “oppression by upper castes, subject to class-based oppression and patriarchal oppression from all men [...] including men of their [own, i.e. Dalit] caste” (pp. 119-120). The mistreatment of Dalit women often goes “unreported and unpublicized” (Mahey, 2003, pp. 151). Narayan (2006) believes that in modern times “most Dalit women experience the agony of ‘untouchability’ very deeply in all walks of life” (p. 156), and that this has given rise to what is called ‘Dalitism’ (Paswan and Jaideva, 2004, p. 37).

‘Dalitism’, as defined by Paswan and Jaideva (2004), refers to the “subjugation of the Dalit socio-politically, economically and culturally [...] all of which embodies different degrees of marginalization [...] legitimized by various social institutions and [...] quasi-legal structures” (p. 37). Within the educational realm, for example, Mahey (2003) asserts that successful Dalit females “are punished by the upper-caste teachers [...] for daring to score good grades” (p. 151). Rajawat (2004) argues that Dalit women are unrepresented in political parties, as “most of the women involved in politics and power sharing come from the upper-caste” community (p. 194). (One exception to this rule, however, is Mayawati, a Dalit, who is the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh State). Mandal (2003) further claims that “Hindu-caste legislators are pleased to [...] take into consideration only the interests of non-Dalit women and not the Dalit women” (p. 185). Moreover, “low-caste women have no representative of their own in Assemblies and parliament to safeguard their interests” (Mandal, 2003, p. 185).

7.1.2 Differences in Identity Between and Among Dalit Women

When speaking of ‘Dalit women’, it is necessary to take into account the complex differences between and within groups of Dalit women. It would not be accurate, for example, to say that all Dalit women live in dreadful conditions of oppression and exclusion. There are differences even within the group we call ‘Dalit’. It is vital to note that the identities of Dalit women are multiple, constantly shifting (Alcoff and Mendieta, 2003), and constructed from sets of available resources. Dalit female identity is hybrid, combining “caste, class and gender” (Paswan and Jaideva, 2004, p. 18). In addition, Dalit females may be identified in terms of how ‘others’ see them; that is, the labels/identities that are constructed on their behalf by various individuals in various circumstances, not under conditions of their own choosing (Alcoff and Mendieta, 2003). In short, Dalit women are a ‘heterogeneous’ group (Paswan and Jaideva, 2004, p. 293). For example, a Dalit woman in a Rajasthani village is as different from a ‘creamy-layer’ Dalit female studying at Shah Jahan University as she is from the males in her village. Those who come from small rural villages may experience more direct, overt discrimination. They often live in the most hierarchical societies. Similarly, Dalit females who live on the streets in large cities may experience exclusion and oppression in overt and direct forms. Although the ‘creamy layer’ in cities are likely still to face covert discrimination, and may be stigmatised by those of higher castes, they are more mobile and better placed to avoid the excesses of oppression. Moreover, they have money and related advantages.

The effects of context and ‘intersectionality’ are crucial. Gender, class and caste, for example, are interwoven in Dalit identity (Deshpande, 2008), and the ‘positionality’ of a Dalit individual is shaped by his/her context. It is possible to argue that all Dalit individuals are positioned as subordinate; however, the situation is made more complex when we consider which groups or members of society are doing the

positioning (Maher and Tetreault, 2001; Alcoff and Mendieta, 2003). The position of Dalit women is determined not only by their caste and gender, but by other factors such as level of education, socio-economic status, and class – ‘creamy layer’ or working class, for example. In short, context shapes positionality (Alcoff and Mendieta, 2003). The identity of Dalit females is thus complex and varied. Their social group is considerably differentiated: between urban and rural, for example, and educated and non-educated, rich and less rich (see Chapter 8). It is vital to note the difficulty of making claims that cover such a heterogeneous group. However, the fact remains that caste, immutably present in the psyche of Indian society, has continued to pose challenges to Dalit females even in a premier university environment. This will become clear as I explore the experiences of Dalit female students in the University of Shah Jahan.

7.1.3 Experiences of ‘Dalit Identity’ among Female Students in the University of Shah Jahan

This chapter explores the perspectives of a unique research sample of Dalit female students. The respondents include women who receive funding from their families (i.e. ‘creamy-layer’ Dalit females), as well as Dalit females on partial and full Quota scholarships (see Table 1). The Dalit females who form this sample may well be understood as individuals who have defied the odds to become Master’s students in an elite university. However, even though these women have gained access to a premier university, aspects of their ‘Dalit identity’ still limit their progress. Although some privileges (namely the Quota System; see Chapters 3 and 6 for further details) have been offered to Dalit females for educational purposes, their “Dalit identity remains a challenge [...] due to [the] hindrance of caste” (Mandal, 2003, pp. 68-71). Neeta, a Dalit female studying in the Department of Sociology at the University of Shah Jahan, expressed her views on her caste:

I'm a Dalit [...] that is who I am. People believe in caste differences [...] everyone at some point, especially Hindus, would share what family and caste background they belong to. The system [of caste] is part of Indian culture and each person identifies with it at some point. So another person sees me as a Dalit [...] and there are times I get treated as a low-caste. (Interview – 11/09/09)

Here, Neeta describes the complex interplay of caste and identity, and its outcomes in treatment which she regards as inextricably linked in the cultural system of Indian society (Chandhoke, 2008).

Meena, a female Dalit in the Department of Management, remarked on her Dalit identity and its repercussions in the university environment as follows:

Well [...] one thing is for sure [...] being a Dalit in this university has its issues! Our non-Dalit female classmates usually refrain from mixing with us [...] I mean [...] I've tried to be friends with them [...] but I feel they do not want me around them. They prefer to be with their own non-Dalit group. Sometimes I wonder [...] what is wrong with being friends with me? (Interview – 09/07/09)

Caste continues to structure the lives of all of the Dalit women I interviewed for this study (Chandhoke, 2008; Paswan and Jaideva, 2004). Covert exclusion is at play, and the effects of caste bias are evident even at a postgraduate level, as Meena reports. In Meena's opinion, some non-Dalit students reinforce caste divisions by acting in a discriminatory fashion. This has often led Dalit students to withhold their personal details due to the inevitable caste identification that will result, and the challenges associated with revealing one's caste. One such example is Sheela, a female in the high-status Department of Engineering, who comes from the 'creamy layer' of the Dalit caste. She shared her views as follows:

I don't necessarily disclose myself as a Dalit. I'm not really comfortable with the term Dalit [...] and I don't think it's necessary that I should disclose my caste to anybody. My friends don't really mention or try to make it obvious what caste they belong to [...] even if they are Brahmin, or Kshatriya [...] or whatever! My classmates don't ask me what caste I belong to [...] I don't see myself as a Dalit [...] I mean [...] we live in a large, diverse city [...] does it really matter what caste tag you carry with you? With my friends I'm like them [...] but maybe at home, and with my Dalit relatives, I'll be looked upon as one of them. (Interview – 05/10/09)

Gewirtz and Cribb (2009) argue that “in actively constructing our identities, we draw on a range of representations [...] in different contexts and at different times” (p. 139). This is necessary, the authors claim, because “identities are about the way we think and the people we want to be” (p. 140). One might argue that Sheela's perception of her own caste affiliation reflects the inequality and exclusion that is usually associated with Dalit identity (Seenarine, 2004). Caste governs gender norms, and is deeply bound up with the cultural norms and practices of Indian society. Sheela's decision to detach herself from the Dalit caste (at least while at Shah Jahan) could thus result in a greater level of acceptance from non-Dalit individuals.

Sunita, a Dalit female student studying in the medium-status Department of Law, reinforced the views expressed by Sheela. Sunita shared her experiences as follows:

I have non-Dalit friends in the university [...] and there are times I intentionally don't quite tell them I'm a Dalit. My non-Dalit friends think I talk like them [...] maybe because of my good schooling [...] and I hang around with them most of the time. (Interview – 02/10/09)

Like Sheela, Sunita belongs to the group of Dalit individuals known as the ‘creamy layer’ of the caste. Her good schooling indicates in effect that she is from a privileged socio-economic class for which caste identity appears not to be a problem: Sunita blends in easily with her non-Dalit friends, with whom she shares an accent (she “talk[s] like them”), a style of dress, mannerisms, a privileged class background, and so on. However, to probe this aspect of her identity further, Sunita was asked the following question: ‘What do you think would have been the initial response if you had shared your Dalit identity?’ Sunita made the following response:

I don’t know [...] I mean chances are that some would not mind [...] and some would have issues hanging around with me. (Interview – 02/10/09)

Crucially, Sunita recognises that the responses of non-Dalit individuals and their views of caste status and caste relations to some degree determine who and what she is. Neeta, a Dalit female student in the Department of Sociology, expressed similar views on the Dalit caste and its status in Indian society today:

Dalit identity in our society is stigmatised [...] no matter how one sees it. Whether a non-Dalit male or female [...] once they know you are a Dalit [...] they won’t immediately walk away from you [...] but yes [...] slowly and steadily they start to maintain their distance from you [...] and you will witness that even in classrooms too [...] like who sits where, and who sits beside whom! (Interview – 11/09/09)

Neeta details the individual reactions that perpetuate casteistic (i.e. caste-biased) attitudes towards the Dalit community. It is evident from Neeta’s account of her experiences that covert discrimination is at work at the University of Shah Jahan, and that caste bias continues to have an extremely negative effect on Dalit women (Paswan and Jaideva, 2004).

7.2 Issues of Access and Participation for Female Dalit Students at the University of Shah Jahan

In this section, I will examine the respondents' experiences of the Quota System, and what they perceive to be its advantages and disadvantages. Secondly, I will explore the cultural and societal demands on Dalit females which influence their access to, and participation in, university life. Finally, I will examine the role of the family and its impact on the lives of Dalit female students during their higher education programmes.

7.2.1 The Quota System and Female Dalit Students' Access to Shah Jahan

Established in the 1950s, the Quota System provided a means for some Dalit males and females to gain access to higher education institutions. However, it was far more difficult for Dalit women to access further studies than Dalit males. This remained the case for decades, until the 1980s, when the government officially recognised the minimal participation of Dalit women in higher education as compared to Dalit males and non-Dalit females. Rao and Latha (2007) emphasise the importance of India's National Policy on Education (NPE), formulated in 1986, which in effect increased the power of the Quota policy to monitor and improve Dalit women's participation in higher education. The policy mandated that precisely half of the total 15% Quota of university places be reserved for Dalit females. Powar (2002) believes that the 15% Quota reservations in Indian universities were part of "an effort to remove gender disparities" and "to maintain equality for the Dalit [both male and female] in the enrolment process" (p. 93). The NPE pledged to play a positive, interventionist role in the empowerment of Dalit women, with particular emphasis on Dalit women's participation in "vocational, technical and professional education at different levels" (Powar, 2002, p. 54). The

result of these efforts was the provision of Quota scholarships specifically for Dalit women interested in furthering their education at university level.

Deepika, a Dalit female in the Department of Chemistry, and a recipient of a full Quota scholarship, commented:

The Quota scholarship has assisted me in pursuing my postgraduate degree. Science subjects [...] are quite expensive in terms of fees. My family would not have been able to assist me with the fees. Because of the Quota I was independent enough to pursue my higher studies. (Interview – 14/08/09)

Speaking of “urban Dalit women”, Paswan and Jaideva (2004) claim that “a small percentage among them have risen to a relatively better status [...] due to [Quota] reservation policies” (p. 38). Deepika is one of the few Dalit females to have received the benefits of a scholarship reserved for Dalit applicants from the government’s Quota fund. However, although the Quota scholarships have often been seen as a means of fulfilling Dalit females’ higher educational aspirations, one respondent in my study opined that the Quota scholarship programme has a covert but deeply entrenched bias towards Dalit male students. Vimal, a Dalit female student in the Department of Law, reported as follows:

I’m on a partial Quota scholarship [...] I was given a choice between paying full fees for tuition or full fees for accommodation. I chose to pay my own tuition fees because, firstly, accommodation is expensive, and secondly, living on campus allows me to access things for free. But [...] what I have a problem with is that the Quota scholarship scheme gives more benefits to Dalit males than us females [...] I mean [...] they are not given a choice [between tuition and accommodation] as we females often are. The scholarship scheme in the law field favours Dalit males over Dalit females. I get the feeling that [...] males are preferred [...] because the course is

already dominated by them. It's frustrating for deserving Dalit female students who want to study law. (Interview – 25/09/09)

Speaking of the Quota policy, Qureshi (2004) argues that “gender discrimination is quite evident”, and that “people prefer a male candidate irrespective of his merits and demerits” (p. 54). Usmani (2004) has also identified a system of discrimination against Dalit females, which (as in Vimal's experience) survives in “subtle and covert forms due to inter-group disparities [ie. Dalit males vs. Dalit females]” (p. 114). Diya, a Dalit female student in the Department of Sociology, agreed:

I feel that Dalit men are prioritised over Dalit females as recipients of full or partial scholarships. Dalit men gain more benefits from the Quota System than us Dalit females. In my view [...] the Quota is biased towards Dalit males. (Interview – 04/09/09)

Diya not only points out the difficulties experienced by Dalit women, but – like Vimal – emphasises the advantages given to Dalit males over Dalit females. This is just one example of the manifold discrimination that continues to work against Dalit women even in today's India on the grounds of their caste, class, and gender.

7.2.2 Cultural and Societal Pressures Influencing Dalit Women's Access to and Participation in Higher Education

Rao and Latha (2007) claim that education in modern-day India is “constrained by people's [...] attitudes, values and culture” (p. 43). Speaking of the patriarchal system in place in India, Rajawat (2004) argues that the social and cultural behaviour of men “affects the social aspirations of women” (p. 190). Seema, a Dalit female student in the Department of History, commented on the cultural attitudes of males:

Oh yes [...] the [patriarchal] culture and the attitudes of men towards women should be kept in mind. Men are still convinced that women should be at home tending to children and household stuff [...] and not spending years in further education. Men believe they should be the bread-winners. They still have the upper hand in our society. (Interview – 07/08/09)

Similarly, Neeta (a Dalit female student in the Department of Sociology) argued that India's culture and traditions best serve the interests of men:

Although I believe the representation of Dalit women in universities has improved [...] the fact remains that family in a larger sense hinders Dalit females in pursuing further education. The culture is male-centred [...] and especially in the Dalit community men really do exercise a lot of power. The male heads of the family decide who deserves further education [...] and the ones who benefit are the males [...] and the ones who don't [...] are females. The fact is, in our culture men hold privileges, not women! (Interview – 11/09/09)

Although the educational objectives stated in India's Constitution (see Chapter 3) have addressed the issue of higher education for Dalit females, Neeta describes a continuing ambivalence felt by males towards females in India's patriarchal culture. Universities are not necessarily free of the more general cultural bias against Dalit women (Rao, 2007).

Sunita, a Dalit female student in the Department of Law, shared her impressions of the cultural demands of family on the lives of Dalit women, even educated women like herself:

Even in a large city like this [...] there are many Dalit women who don't get the chance to pursue education at the postgraduate level. They are under so much pressure [...] families and relatives remind you of the traditional demands and culture of a family [...] often implying that a woman's role is to remain within a family. All of this becomes really hard for the women in our culture. (Interview – 02/10/09)

Mandal (2003) suggests that the “status of women in Indian society can be examined in the context of treatment they get from the male population either from their own kith and kin or from the common public” (p. 68). Sunita believes that Dalit females find themselves assessed according to prevailing cultural and traditional norms perpetuated within their own families and communities (Bettcher, 2007). It could be argued that, on the contrary, some Dalit families do support Dalit females in gaining access to further study, as in Sunita's own case; however, this is rarely the case within the Dalit community. Instead, Dalit females are more regularly taken for granted in the context of family, which plays a crucial role in the lives of non-Dalit and Dalit women alike. In general, the educational choices made by Dalit females are heavily influenced by the preferences of their families, as will be discussed in the subsequent section.

7.2.3 Cultural and Social Pressures Placed on Dalit Females

Family plays a crucial role in determining the educational aspirations and development of Dalit women. By contrast, as discussed in Chapter 6, Dalit male students rarely report that their families have hindered or otherwise interfered with their attempts to achieve educational goals. As long as the traditional hierarchical structure of the patriarchal system remains in force in Indian society, the culture of male dominance will continue to play a pivotal role within the family (Rajawat,

2004). Rajawat (2004) comments that although urban Dalit women are more confident than their rural counterparts, due to a more solid educational background, patriarchal ideology remains “quite strong within the household” (p. 188). Sunita, a Dalit female in the Department of Law at Shah Jahan, identified this pressure at work within her own family:

As a postgraduate student in this university I do my research [...] do my own thing [...] have my own set of friends. But at home [...] I have to listen to the male ‘voices’ of my house. I constantly have to make sure their needs come before mine or my mum’s. The female role outside the house, away from family, is very different [...] I mean [...] I can be myself and do what I like [...] but once I’m home I have to maintain my submissive attitude to them no matter what. (Interview – 02/10/09)

Kannabiran (2009) claims that the “practices of dominance and hegemony are tied [...] within the system” (p. 322). While Sunita clearly has access to some degree of personal freedom outside the household, she continues to experience domination and submission within the family context (Kannabiran, 2009). Vijaya, a Dalit female in the Department of Psychology, shared another such experience:

Whether Dalit or non-Dalit [...] males have the upper hand. In our house my dad and brother make all the decisions [...] and they have the last word in everything. Even though I’m studying for a postgraduate degree [...] as a Dalit female I still have to listen to them [...] and not listening to my father could ruin my hopes of studying further for this degree [...] for example, he could marry me off immediately! I mean [...] patriarchy is a very strong element of our culture [...] and this happens in most homes. (Interview – 31/07/09)

Dalit family life is male-centred, and Jogdand (1995) claims that “even an educated Dalit woman cannot take decisions on her own” (p. 110). Vijaya’s account of her experiences reflects gender inequality and the effects of gender stereotyping. The persistence of these stereotypes has meant that little has changed in the political or social milieu of Indian society (Usmani, 2004). Chakravarty (2008) claims that such inequality is “invisibilized under the notion of [...] upholding ‘tradition’ or the specific ‘cultures’ of families” (p. 144). In other words, male-centric structures are continually upheld.

Meena, a Dalit female in the Department of Management at Shah Jahan, shared similar views of her own and her friends’ experiences of living in a patriarchal culture:

It is not easy for my many Dalit friends. One of my Dalit friends comes from a family of five. As the only sister amongst her four brothers she was allowed to study up until high school. Her pursuit of higher studies was then limited by her family. As for me [...] as their only daughter my parents supported my higher studies [...] but if I had more siblings [...] as in brothers [...] then it would have been different for me. (Interview – 09/07/09)

Meena’s account suggests that patriarchal tradition is firmly entrenched within the structure of her own family. As Paswan and Jaideva (2004) argue, “Dalit often support male education” over that of females (p. 23). Males are again found to have the upper hand educationally, which in turn perpetuates the beliefs and practices that for centuries have discriminated against Dalit women in a variety of ways (Shinde, 2005). Diya, a Dalit female in the Department of Sociology, described such an incident that took place among her close relatives:

Two of my female cousins have had to limit their pursuit of higher education [...] just because they had to get married off quickly. But what really bothers me is that my cousins were told by her family that they should not be more qualified than their potential grooms, or even have the same level of education [...] or else they won't easily be married off [...] I really oppose this attitude. (Interview – 04/09/09)

Even today, the lives of Dalit women are, as Charvarty (2008) asserts, “located at the intersection of class, caste and patriarchy/ies”, all of which work to oppress them (p. 114). Dalit females thus occupy a difficult position, with fewer rights than their male counterparts. Subramaniam (2005) argues that, increasingly, Indian society is using “culture as the grounds for controlling” Dalit women and ensuring their submissiveness (p. 50). Neelima, a Dalit female student in the Department of Management at Shah Jahan, described such acts of familial control:

I have to listen to my family. It's important that I listen as I have always been taught that my father is the head of the house [...] especially as he has paid for all of my education over the years. This is a male-centred society [...] I have to follow the cultural rules as is required of me [...] but I also bear in mind that, as a Dalit, I am privileged to have received my father's support for my postgraduate education [...] or else I would have been married off quickly with only limited qualifications. (Interview – 03/08/09)

While women may “derive certain benefits” from the patriarchal system to which they belong, “these benefits are available to them only after they conform to the patriarchal codes of their families [...] and deviance expels them from the resources of the family” (Chakravarty, 2008, p. 144). This is certainly the case for Neelima. Like other ‘creamy-layer’ Dalit women, Neelima receives financial support from her family, and is allowed to continue university education. However, her views and experiences, like those of other Dalit respondents in this study, reflect the

tensions and conflicts that often structure the lives of female Dalit postgraduates. Neelima's experiences offer insight into the effects that the views of Indian families can have on individuals' life choices, and thus their lives and future careers.

7.3 Views and Experiences of Dalit Females at the University of Shah Jahan

In this section, I will first explore and examine the experiences reported by Dalit females in terms of their interaction with tutors. Secondly, I will investigate the relationships between Dalit and non-Dalit individuals inside and outside classroom settings. Lastly, I will address Dalit students' concerns about the level of support offered to them by the University of Shah Jahan.

7.3.1 Tutors' Attitudes towards Dalit Female Students

Mandal (2003) emphasises that "[c]asteism [caste bias] in India occupies every field of human activity" (p. 185). Forms of caste bias in tutors' dealings with their students, both inside and outside the classroom setting, are evidenced by the responses of current students at the University of Shah Jahan. Sheela, a Dalit female student in the Department of Engineering, commented as follows:

There are no female Dalit professors or lecturers in this department [...] it's mostly male professors and a few non-Dalit female lecturers. This place is just dominated by them [non-Dalit]! (Interview – 05/10/09)

Subramaniam (2005) claims that "women academics are predominantly from the upper castes", and that these women tend to neglect Dalit female students (p. 45). Another aspect of the university environment, therefore, can pose a challenge for

Dalit female students: the attitudes of their tutors. Meena, a Dalit female in the Department of Management, shared the following information:

Let me be frank [...] there is no difference between male or female staff in their attitude towards Dalit. I have been ignored by them on many levels [...] whether course stuff or personal stuff. They just do not seem to show much concern toward us [...] which is a bit unfortunate! (Interview – 09/07/09)

Non-Dalit individuals can in many ways “manifest a condescending attitude [...] especially college authorities in their dealings with the lower castes [Dalit]” (Channa, 2005, p. 59). Channa (2005) adds that unequal treatment is frequent in universities, and that some tutors show a “fair amount of restraint in their interaction with Dalit females” (p. 59). Vijaya, a Dalit female in the Department of Psychology at Shah Jahan, described this marginalisation as follows:

Dalit feel the brunt of marginalisation. I’m sure the staff members know who the Dalit students are in their classrooms. From the admission forms it’s easy to pick out Dalit candidates [...] and separate forms that have an ‘X’ mark in the ‘Scheduled Caste’ [Dalit] cell. Also [...] since there are not that many people in class [...] it is quite easy to find out who is who. (Interview – 31/07/09)

Deepika, a Dalit female in the Department of Chemistry, shared a similar view:

Class tutors are aware of who we are [...] so there is this feeling of being sidelined in favour of the other, non-Dalit students. (Interview – 14/08/09)

Both Vijaya and Deepika hint at a possible unfairness in the student recruitment process. The situation has improved only marginally for Dalit females, and Chandra

(2004) argues that the prescribed quotas for the “Dalit are often not filled on account of the indifference of the heads of the departments” (p. 74), who have control of recruitment (Narkhede, 2001).

The experiences of both Vijaya and Deepika indicate the capacity for tutors to hinder the development of Dalit in higher education by influencing the selection process in favour of non-Dalit and thus weakening the Quota policy’s original aim of promoting Dalit access to universities. Regrettably, such behaviour has disadvantaged Dalits in great need of assistance. Many of the Dalit students interviewed for this study (both male and female) expressed their concern about this issue, which poses a dire threat to Dalits’ future access to higher education.

7.3.2 Relations with Non-Dalit Male and Female Colleagues In and Outside the Classroom

Alongside the attitudes of some tutors towards Dalit female students, it is also important to consider those of non-Dalit classmates – male and female – who also play a role in the educational experiences of Dalit women. As Channa (2005) argues, caste-biased attitudes are usually “internalized and practised against Dalits by non-Dalit individuals from an upper-caste background” (p. 53). Generally speaking, even educated non-Dalit students marginalise the Dalits (Westeimer & Suurtann, 2009). It is worth noting that there is a great disparity in the socio-economic and cultural make-up of non-Dalit and Dalit students. As a consequence, the privileged, grammar school-educated non-Dalit gradually start to exclude the Dalits (Westeimer and Suurtann, 2009).

Vimal, a female Dalit student in the Department of Law, had this to say:

What I find surprising is how non-Dalit females behave with us. I realise that we don't speak fluently as they do [...] but that does not mean we are dumb and know nothing at all. I always get the feeling from them that we are not as good as them. It is pretty clear to me that they prefer to be with their own non-Dalit friends. (Interview – 25/09/09)

Vijaya, a Dalit female in the Department of Psychology, described a similar experience:

I remember one day during lunch break I went to the common room where students usually go to chat or eat their packed lunches. I went there with my friend to have lunch [...] and noticed after a minute or two that the non-Dalit students [both males and females] had left the room [...] and it was only the two of us in the room having lunch [...] I found it weird [...] that my classmates would act in this way. This attitude makes it very clear to me that caste bias exists [...] whether in this university or outside [...] it's all the same. (Interview – 31/07/09)

In practice, therefore, it seems that caste discrimination remains in force; indeed, Chakravarty (2008) claims that it is “widely prevalent” even “in public spaces” (p. 140). Caste may be invisible to the outsider with a limited understanding of its functions. To a Dalit individual, however, caste is clearly visible. Neeta, a Dalit female in the Department of Sociology, related another such experience:

I also notice this during class presentations when we are put in groups by our tutors to work together on a topic to be presented to class [...] my group, mostly non-Dalit, began working together and discussing the topic and made me feel as though I were not part of their group. Even when I added something relevant [...] my views were often ignored and another student's views were taken into consideration. This attitude is prevalent in

my class [...] and it is sad to see this happening even in a postgraduate environment. (Interview – 11/09/09)

Although some Dalit women have secured university places with the assistance of Quota reservations, as Dalits they continue to experience a sense of exclusion (from high-caste non-Dalits) in the university setting. Deep-seated traditions of caste inequality combined with the imbalance of “power [...] with respect to gender [i.e. between non-Dalit and Dalit females]” (Chakravarty, 2008, p. 394) result in the continued manifestation of caste bias against Dalit females by non-Dalit females and males alike. Moreover, discrimination is often exacerbated by the attitudes of non-Dalit male colleagues. According to Meena, a Dalit female in the medium-status Department of Management at Shah Jahan:

The majority of students in my management class are males [...] mostly non-Dalit males. There are fewer females in my class. Non-Dalit males know I’m a Dalit [...] and they have asked me weird questions such as how did I get into management? Which school did I attend? What grades did I earn? Am I on a Quota scholarship? Or [...] like [...] does the Quota System allot seats to people with low grades? I know what they are hinting at [...] that’s their way of being sarcastic with me. (Interview – 09/07/09)

Here, Meena describes the experience of being the object of overt discrimination. Dalit individuals are often stigmatised in this way, with various derogatory labels used to refer to them. One such example provided by Channa (2005) is the term “Quota doctors”, which is a popular label “for those [Dalit students] who have entered the medical profession through the reservation quotas” (p. 59). Clearly, such labels are another form of discrimination against the Dalit. In this light, it seems evident that, as Chakravarti (2008) opines, “Dalit [students] have hardly experienced any substantial change” (p. 141).

7.3.3 University Student Counselling Centre

My findings thus far indicate that female Dalit postgraduates experience, at the very least, some uncomfortable situations. The University of Shah Jahan has taken some action to alleviate students' difficulties, notably through the provision of a counselling centre. In this section, I will examine the nature and role of the university's Student Counselling Centre, which was highlighted by the Dalit female respondents in this study as an important part of the support provided within university life.

The counselling centre established by the university has the potential to play a significant role in counselling students or otherwise supporting those who seek guidance in order to manage within the university environment. Seema, a female Dalit student studying in the Department of History at the University of Shah Jahan, was asked whether the Student Counselling Centre had helped her with her problems. Her response was as follows:

Instead of a non-Dalit female counsellor or male counsellor [...] it would have been better to have had a female Dalit counsellor who understood our issues as a fellow Dalit, who could speak our local dialect [i.e. the Malayali language] [...] and who would be comfortable with speaking openly about our problems in the university. (Interview – 07/08/09).

Seema points out that the lack of Dalit female representatives within the University of Shah Jahan, and specifically in the Counselling Centre, reduces the effectiveness of any support and guidance provided to Dalit female students. Her experience indicates that counselling and guidance services may need to be organised in a more meaningful way; for example, by appointing counsellors who represent the Dalit caste (Rao and Latha, 2007). Seema highlights caste bias as a problem that requires an urgent solution.

Meena, a female Dalit student in the Department of Management, took a different emphasis, commenting on the difficulty of obtaining appointments with the university counsellors:

I think that the non-Dalit counsellors and management who dominate the student centre administration have no time for us Dalit females [...] we are either told that no female staff are present to see us [...] and that we must wait, or they act as if they are too busy with other student appointments. I feel that they do this to avoid attending to us. (Interview – 09/07/09)

Meena's experience is characteristic of the lack of on-campus support that seems all-pervasive in the university environment. In her view, the disinterest exhibited by the university's counselling staff reflects their caste bias against Dalit students. At the very least, this lack of support demonstrates an indifference on the part of the Counselling Centre to the plight of female Dalit students – which could certainly reinforce, if not produce, the exclusionary patterns that continue to disadvantage Dalit females (Seenarine, 2004).

Although one might expect a university's student counselling centre to play a crucial role in easing the problems faced by Dalit students, the respondents quoted above describe quite a different situation in the case of Shah Jahan. In their experience, the Counselling Centre turns a 'deaf ear' to their issues, or exhibits a lack of concern for their emotional challenges within the university environment. In the course of my interview sessions, I asked all the respondents whether any other form of support – a group promoting diversity or equality, say, or even a Dalit support group/network – existed within the university setting. They informed me that although no group focused on diversity or equality, they had attended meetings held by a small Dalit support group. However, this group consisted only of a few Dalit male students, with hardly any Dalit females in attendance. As a result, the

female respondents felt that the Dalit support network was overwhelmingly male-centric.

7.4 Inclusion and Exclusion in the University

In this section, I will examine the issues of inclusion and exclusion reported by my female Dalit respondents in their everyday lives in the University of Shah Jahan. First, the section will explore issues of social justice in relation to Dalit females.

7.4.1 Social Justice Concerns in Relation to the Experiences of Dalit Female Students

Although the Constitution of India requires that “all citizens be treated equally, and have equal rights”, Rajawat (2004) claims that India’s judicial system “is not seriously concerned about [...] Dalit women” (p. 192). Indian judicial processes have failed to demonstrate an adequate commitment to implementing laws to protect and safeguard the interests of Dalit women. There is thus a need for sensitive and strict administration both to enforce the law and to bring about certain changes in the existing law for the benefit of Dalit women (Rajawat, 2004).

Even though political parties in India talk about the equality of women in abstract terms, they have in practice ignored Dalit females, whose political and social status and participation in all spheres of society is subordinate and severely limited (Rajawat, 2004). The issue of human rights and social justice for the Dalit community was raised during the interviews for this study, leading to an enquiry as to how much actual support is provided to Dalit female students who want to access, or have accessed, university learning. Deepika, a Dalit female student in the Department of Chemistry, shared her own experiences of this matter:

Oh well! Our society with its religions, ancient culture and traditions [...] makes it hard enough to achieve the betterment of females in general [...] let alone Dalit females. And the issue of human rights or social justice for us Dalit [...] who really cares? [...] I mean [...] people argue you have the Quota System to assist you – what more do you require? Do people really understand the competition involved in attaining a Quota scholarship? Do these non-Dalit even know that the management governing the Quota reservations has more non-Dalit high-castes present on the committee than Dalit individuals [...] and that Dalit males are likely to be selected over Dalit females? (Interview – 14/08/09)

Although the Quota scholarship scheme plays a pivotal role in Dalit access to higher education, Deepika indicts the system for unfairness, citing its sexism, its casteism, and its male-centric structure (Paswan and Jaideva, 2004). Deepika considers the Quota policy to manifest a socio-political trend towards the exploitation of Dalit women, as well as a “denial of social justice and human rights” in this regard (Rajawat, 2004, p. 192).

Neeta, a Dalit female in the Department of Sociology, commented:

There are a lot of calls for social justice and other stuff [...] but when it boils down to Dalit women’s rights [...] especially in attaining university education [...] I mean really [...] no one cares!! The feeling is like [...] we are nothing. (Interview – 11/09/09)

D’Souza (2009) claims that “accessing justice is a far cry [from fulfilment] for almost all” Dalit women (p. 67). In Indian society, ‘Dalitism’ entails marginalisation, and hence the denial of basic human rights and social justice for Dalit females and the Dalit community at large (Paswan and Jaideva, 2004).

Gewirtz and Cribb (2009) claim that such “processes [of discrimination] [...] necessarily involve the construction of boundaries and exclusions” (p. 138). In other words, Indian society is governed by caste and deeply conditioned by caste-based stereotypes and firm gendered boundaries, leading to exclusionary patterns.

Vimal, a Dalit female in the Department of Law, shared her disappointment at the exclusionary patterns she has observed in her own departmental environment:

This is a premier university [...] and what I find hypocritical about the students in our class is that they talk about social justice and maintaining Quota privileges to improve the situation for Dalit communities in India [...] but the fact of the matter is that these very students don't really practise what they say. I mean [...] I was once questioned rather abruptly by two senior non-Dalit male students [...] who were actually department representatives [...] and knew I was a Dalit. They asked whether I was a Quota student in this department [...] which I found rather upsetting [...] Using the term ‘Quota student’ to a Dalit is humiliating [...] it's like telling us we are here not because of our grades, but due to Quota reservations. (Interview – 25/09/09)

Such a confrontation would indeed be a sensitive matter for a Dalit student, as a member of a disenfranchised community in India (Jogdand, 1995; Capeheart and Milovanovic, 2007). Vimal's experience, like that of the male Dalit respondents discussed in Chapter 6, emphasises both the intensity and the ubiquity of the difficulties encountered by Dalit students (Rana, 2008). In Vimal's case, the assistance provided by Quota reservations in mobilising Dalits in higher education was used against her. It is evident that, over time, the Quota reservation policy has helped members of the Dalit community to enter higher degree programmes (Deshpande, 2008) – including Vimal herself, who receives a partial Quota scholarship. Yet her remarks highlight a significant aspect of the Quota issue that

affects many Dalits in the educational environment. Non-Dalits may utilise the policy to nullify the real achievements of Dalits (Chalam, 2007): students like Vimal, who have earned their places in premier universities. This kind of behaviour amounts to discrimination and oppression.

7.4.2 Practices of Integration and Segregation

The Dalit females interviewed for this study are keenly aware of the disadvantages and limitations imposed on them within Indian society due to their gender and caste. Academic politics continue, on the whole, to be structured according to caste; with the effect, in turn, of sharpening caste divides between non-Dalit and Dalit females (Paswan and Jaideva, 2004).

Jyoti, a non-Dalit studying in the Department of Medicine highlights this caste divide:

There is one Dalit woman studying in my department [...] and I often see her sitting alone in one corner of the class room [...] our student numbers in the class are small [...] and many of us know that she is of a Dalit caste.
(Interview - 31/07/09)

Caste prejudice has prevented the attainment of equality between non-Dalit and Dalit individuals. As a consequence, the anxiety and anger of Dalit females about their general treatment often go unheard and/or unanswered, as there are no institutionally established groups for supporting women or promoting gender equity at Shah Jahan. Instead, Dalit females tend to share their problems with friends, family, and/or fellow students primarily from the Dalit caste.

Neeta, a Dalit female in the Department of Sociology at Shah Jahan, described her own frustration:

We talk about women's rights [...] but the fact of the matter is that Dalit women are mistreated and segregated from non-Dalit women [...] and we don't get much support from them [non-Dalit females] either. I think we have to face this reality first [...] I think this issue needs to be looked at closely and addressed widely. (Interview – 11/09/09)

Neeta highlights the problems that non-Dalit females can cause for Dalit females, as well as the lack of support offered by upper-caste females to Dalit women more generally. Channa (2005) believes that this kind of oppression survives in subtle or overt forms, and has “its roots deeply entrenched in the social norms” of Indian society (p. 51). Seema, a Dalit female student in the Department of History, offered a similar view:

Non-Dalit women in our department really don't have the time to mix with us [...] they have their own set of friends and mingle with people they easily connect with [...] we and our issues don't matter to them [...] and also I feel they want to maintain a safe distance and stay within the comfort of their own group [...] that's how it really is! (Interview – 07/08/09)

Seema's observations corroborate those of other respondents in drawing attention to the fact that non-Dalit females do not generally mix with Dalit females. To probe the issue even further, Seema was asked if she had encountered similar issues as an undergraduate student in her college days:

Oh yes! [...] As an undergraduate it was hard enough to connect with non-Dalits [...] however, I hadn't expected it to be the same here in this large university [the University of Shah Jahan]. I'm not implying that non-Dalits

blatantly discriminate against us [...] however, I would add that [...] here there is a clear ‘invisible’ line of caste separation. As a Dalit [...] this line is very visible, as I am accustomed to being sidelined. (Interview – 07/08/09)

One might imagine that things would be better at the University of Shah Jahan, a world-class institution with highly qualified faculty members and well-educated students. It would be logical to assume, too, that more tolerance would be shown in an environment with an explicit pledge of equality. However, Seema’s report highlights the reality of caste bias within a premier university, being practised covertly rather than overtly. Her experience of being ‘sidelined’ in the past (perhaps in her previous college) indicates quite clearly that the culture of caste still exists within the academic life of the university.

Chandra (2004) believes that “caste feelings still persist”, and that this attitude “does not permit an egalitarian approach” (p. 74). Instead, “upper-castes show disregard to the lower castes [Dalit]” (Chandra, 2004, p. 74). Although Chandra’s view is to a certain degree valid, this is not always the case. It is crucial to note that, although caste bias against Dalit individuals is often manifested by those of a higher caste, some non-Dalit individuals claim to remain uninfluenced by the caste-class schism, and believe in an egalitarian approach. One example is Manisha, a non-Dalit female student in the Department of Engineering, who viewed the caste divide with scepticism.

I have no issues with the Dalit caste! I mean, it’s just this ancient caste stuff [...] I really don’t care! I know of a Dalit person in my class [...] who I sometimes chat with. I admire this person for making it this far and gaining a place at the university. (Interview – 31/07/09)

Sheela, a creamy-layer Dalit female student in the Department of Engineering, took a similar stance:

I often hang out with my non-Dalit female classmates in the university [...] and I know a few male colleagues who have no problems with my being a Dalit. I feel they overlook this caste stuff [...] they are more liberal in their ways. (Interview – 05/10/09)

Manisha's awareness of the problems faced by Dalit students in a higher education environment, and her own democratic approach, together with Sheela's view of her non-Dalit friends, reflect an understanding of castelessness (i.e., caste without bias) (Srinivas, 2008). However, the responses of these particular individuals indicate a social affinity with Dalit students that was rarely expressed by the non-Dalit female respondents in this study.

It is also important to note that Sheela, as a creamy-layer Dalit studying engineering (a high-status subject), has had the privilege of high-status schooling, and a privileged lifestyle more generally. Sheela's past college education, her current subject of study, and her close affiliation with non-Dalit individuals in the past and present contribute to her positive opinion of non-Dalit attitudes. Although such affinities may exist between certain non-Dalit and Dalit caste members (as in the cases of Sheela and Manisha), this cannot be said of Dalit females in general. Seema, Diya, and Deepika, for example, who are on full and partial Quota scholarships, continue to face resentment and oppression in higher education based upon their affiliation to the Dalit caste and their less privileged economic background. Elements of caste hierarchy and separation (Shah, 2004) are prevalent in higher education, as the respondents' experiences at the University of Shah Jahan clearly indicate. Even at this premier university, the age-old structures of caste bias and gender hierarchy continue to be influential. The caste-divide mentality is strengthening and sharpening even today, to the detriment of Dalit individuals and their educational and life aspirations (Rana, 2008).

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to explore the experiences of some Dalit women caught in patriarchy's web of oppressive ideology and tradition, and facing the effects of caste bias while participating in higher education. Caste, identity and gender are so intricately interwoven in the lives of Dalit females that they cannot but shape the oppression and exclusion Dalit female students encounter at Shah Jahan. This chapter has argued that social justice for Dalit women calls for much closer scrutiny. The Dalit female students at the University of Shah Jahan are at a relative advantage compared to the many Dalit women who are not able to access this elite institution, yet simultaneously, these women can sometimes still feel like 'have-nots' in university life.

One of the tensions in Indian public life is that while some notion of equal rights is enshrined in the Indian Constitution, along with some laws to safeguard and promote Dalits' socio-economic and political development, at least rhetorically, there are no specific measures in place to support the specific development of Dalit females (Subramaniam, 2006). Thus, women's rights are subsumed within an overarching approach that does not recognize gender difference. The situation for Dalit women is even more complex. Positioned as women in a society made up of patriarchal codes that perpetuate gender discrimination within Indian society at large, Dalit women are further marginalized because of their caste background.

The effects of 'intersectionality' play into the ways in which Dalit women are regarded and treated. Gender, class and caste, for example, are interwoven in Dalit identity (Deshpande, 2008), and the 'positionality' of a Dalit individual is shaped by his/her context. It is possible to argue that most Dalit females are positioned as subordinate; and the situation is made more complex when we consider which groups or members of society are doing the positioning (Maher and Tetreault, 2001; Alcoff *et al.*, 2003). In short, context shapes positionality (Alcoff *et al.*, 2003).

Dalits' social position is determined not only by their caste and gender, but by other factors such as level of education, socio-economic status, and class – whether they belong to the 'creamy layer' or the working class, for example.

The identity of Dalit women is both complex and varied. The intricate relationship between caste and gender opens up many different positions within the category of the 'Dalit female'. Some of these positions carry more shame than others. Considerable differentiation is made between poorer rural Dalit women and creamy-layer urban Dalit women, for example; and between those who are educated and non-educated, affluent and less rich. It is critical to note the difficulties involved in making claims that cover such a diverse and heterogeneous group. For example, the experiences of a Dalit female in a small rural village are entirely different from those of a creamy-layer Dalit female in a large city. Those who come from small rural villages may experience more direct, overt forms of discrimination. They often live in the most hierarchical and repressive communities (Thorat, 2009). Dalit females who live in large cities may experience equivalent forms of exclusion and oppression. However, although creamy-layer Dalit women in cities are likely still to face covert discrimination, and may be marginalised by non-Dalit females of higher castes, they are more mobile and better placed to avoid the extremes of caste subjugation (Rana, 2008).

Crucially, Dalit women at the University of Shah Jahan experience exclusion on the grounds of their caste. The types and severity of caste exclusion vary. Those from the creamy layer, for instance, may be better able to evade oppression, as their caste is likely to be less clearly fore-grounded in the university setting. Within their families, however, the same women may be positioned differently within the established gender hierarchy. Dalit females from less advantaged backgrounds may be vulnerable to a more complex – indeed 'doubled' – form of exclusion: on the basis of both caste and gender. They have fewer resources available to counter this oppression, compared to creamy-layer women who have the 'right' accents and

vocabulary to 'pass', at least at Shah Jahan. Although in the minority, creamy-layer Dalit females are better placed either to manage or to subvert some of the exclusionary patterns that afflict Dalits' broader participation in society.

The experiences of the Dalit female respondents interviewed for this chapter highlight the various ways in which their gender, caste and class (Paswan and Jaideva, 2003; Mahey, 2003) positioning leaves them vulnerable. Both caste and gender contribute to the exclusion and/or marginalisation of Dalit females, who face subjugation and unequal treatment in socio-economic, cultural and political contexts, often leaving them untouched by social progress (Manoranjana, 2004). Moreover, the experiences shared by the Dalit respondents in interview are indicative of the ongoing nature of their (usually caste-related) difficulties. These processes of inclusion and exclusion also reflect the complexities that exist within the Dalit community as a whole. It is important to bear in mind that caste governs gender norms, and is deeply bound up with the cultural traditions and practices of Indian society (Subramaniam, 2006). Although men and women are equally important components of the Dalit community, the particular situation of Dalit females and the prejudices they face as a result of the complex interactions of gender, caste and class (Paswan and Jaideva, 2003; Mahey, 2003) would require considerable additional investigation.

The chapter presents several examples of relatively successful Dalit women who contextualise their personal struggles against exclusion in the University of Shah Jahan. The difficulties, exclusion and marginalisation experienced by these students are the result of the religious and cultural norms of Indian society, which have become part of the university's own culture. Although Dalit women have begun to enter the portals of higher education in India, the prejudice and marginalisation they often encounter reflects the continuance of upper-caste governance, authority and control. The superiority of non-Dalit male and female students is asserted over Dalit

females, and indeed Dalit students at large – which in turn sets non-Dalit firmly against Dalit, even at a reputable university.

Chapter 8

Positioning Dalit Caste Relations and the Quota Policy: A Critical Analysis

“One should also examine the internal schisms within the Dalit jatis [caste].” (Nisar and Kandasamy, 2007, p. 87)

8. Introduction

The previous chapters (Chapters 5, 6 and 7) analysed the diverse personal and educational challenges faced by Dalit individuals in negotiating a (mainly) non-Dalit administration, faculty and student cohort at the University of Shah Jahan. In this chapter, I wish to take a critical approach to the experiences reported by the Dalit students and faculty with specific reference to social interactions within the Dalit community itself. Thus far, this thesis has focused on exploring and critically evaluating the experiences reported by Dalit of various oppressive practices that shape their lives in higher education. From these reports, it appears that oppression is visited upon the Dalit primarily by the more powerful dominant castes. However, oppression is not as simple a phenomenon as this would suggest; it seems likely, for instance, that internal oppression and differences have plagued the Dalit caste for many years.

In this chapter, I will critically explore and examine the perceptions and experiences of individuals of the Dalit caste with particular reference to their relationships and interactions with each other. The University of Shah Jahan houses

a diverse Dalit population which includes both privileged ‘creamy-layer’ Dalit students and their less privileged counterparts (referred to as ‘Quota’ Dalits in this chapter and elsewhere), who depend to a greater extent on Quota scholarships.

In order to investigate Dalit positionality and the internal relations of the Dalit caste community, this chapter will explore the following research questions:

- How do differences within the Dalit community shape the experiences of Dalit students within one elite university setting?
- How successful is the government’s Quota System policy in helping the Dalit to gain access to higher education (given these internal differences)?

The objective is to present a fuller and more balanced account of the Dalit caste, within whose community there are more than 900 sub-castes (D’ Souza, 2009). The position of each is rooted in its regional culture; the Dalit do not have a homogeneous culture or history (Gnanaraj and Krishnamurthy, 2000; Sunderaj, 2000). Given these complex differences, the relationship between the Dalit caste and its sub-castes offers a worthwhile point of focus for further analysis and discussion. The Quota policy, which was designed some time ago to promote the social mobility and advancement of the Dalit as a homogeneous community (grouping them together as – ‘Dalit’) has had some modest successes. However, these successes have often been costly in terms of the lack of respect and lack of recognition that have marked the social worlds of the Dalit community – even in elite settings such as Shah Jahan. Some members of the Dalit – namely those of the creamy layer – have disassociated themselves from other, less advantaged Dalit, such that a more insidious form of exclusion within inclusion is being perpetuated. In order to address this issue, this chapter will examine details of the Quota System policies that cast light on the intrinsic and multi-faceted differences that exist between individuals of the Dalit caste.

The chapter will make use of interviews with a total of 16 participants. The responses of 10 Dalit (8 male and 2 female – see Table 1) students were selected for analysis in this chapter. The reason for their selection is twofold: first, the chosen Dalit students represent a variety of course subjects, and have thus encountered different experiences depending on their field of study. Secondly, these particular participants were open, candid and willing to share their experiences at university and their views about the Dalit people in some detail. All of the participants were vocal about the complexities that exist within their community, and their responses disclose comparable yet wide-ranging experiences of university life in India at the present time. They recognised and freely discussed the difficulties that currently face Dalit students, and the future of their large and diverse community. In order to gain a holistic insight into the situation of the Dalit people in higher education, this chapter also makes use of the observations of an additional, diverse group of 6 participants: 1 non-Dalit student; 3 Dalit faculty members (2 male and 1 female – see Table 2); the State Government Vice-Chairman of the Minorities Commission of India; and one senior government policy maker (see Table 3) in the state's higher educational sector.

The major themes to emerge from the coded data are as follows:

- Quota policy: rising tensions among Dalits in higher education – competition for Quota seats and tensions surrounding the certification process for Quota seats in university education;
- 'Creamy-layer' Dalits versus 'Quota' Dalits – issues and challenges in the University of Shah Jahan;
- Caste division among Dalit students at the university – sub-caste divisions;
- Rising concerns among Dalit students in higher education regarding class differences, educational competition, regional and language divides, and the consequent challenges to Dalit unity.

Table 1: Participant interviews (students)

Name (pseudonym)	University department & subject status	Gender and Quota status
1) Chetan	Department of Psychology (<i>low-status subject</i>)	Dalit male (partial Quota scholarship)
2) Dinesh	Department of Sociology (<i>low-status subject</i>)	Dalit male (partial Quota scholarship)
3) Anil	Department of History (<i>low-status subject</i>)	Dalit male (partial Quota scholarship)
4) Lalit	Department of Law (<i>medium-status subject</i>)	Dalit male (partial Quota scholarship)
5) Rajeev	Department of Management (<i>medium-status subject</i>)	Dalit male (partial Quota scholarship)
6) Vimal	Department of Law (<i>medium-status subject</i>)	Dalit female (partial Quota scholarship)
7) Samrat	Department of Law (<i>medium-status subject</i>)	Dalit male (full Quota scholarship)
8) Anand	Department of Management (<i>medium-status subject</i>)	Dalit male (creamy layer)
9) Pankaj	Department of Chemistry (<i>high-status subject</i>)	Dalit male (creamy layer)
10) Sheela	Department of Engineering (<i>high-status subject</i>)	Dalit female (creamy layer)
11) Atul	Department of Engineering (<i>high-status subject</i>)	Non-Dalit male (Quota status – not applicable)

Table 2: Participant interviews (faculty)

Name (pseudonym)	University department & Subject status	Non-Dalit/Dalit, and gender
1) Dr. Mandeep	Department of Psychology (<i>low-status subject</i>)	Dalit female (<i>faculty member</i>)
2) Dr. Khosla	Department of Education (<i>low-status subject</i>)	Dalit male (<i>faculty member</i>)
3) Professor. Nagarjuna	Department of Sociology (<i>low-status subject</i>)	Dalit male (<i>faculty member</i>)

Table 3: Participant interviews (members of government)

Name (pseudonym)	Professional role	Job title/gender
1) Dr. Narasimha	Minorities Commission of India (Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes) – Haryana State	Vice-Chairman (<i>non-Dalit male</i>)
2) Mr. Shyam	Division on Policies for Higher Education in India – Haryana State	Senior government official (<i>Dalit male</i>)

All of the student participants involved in the provision of evidence for this chapter were Dalit, with one exception. Of the 10 Dalit respondents, 8 were male and 2 female. 6 Dalit students (Dinesh, Anil, Lalit, Chetan, Rajeev, and Vimal) are on partial Quota scholarships (which includes hostel accommodation and food for students undertaking two-year Master's degrees), while Samrat, another Dalit, is on a full Quota scholarship (which includes tuition and accommodation). The remaining 3 Dalit respondents (Anand, Pankaj, and Sheela) receive funding from their families, and belong to the professional 'creamy layer' of Dalit society (Guru & Chakravarty, 2005; Rana, 2008, p. 189). The responses of 3 Dalit faculty members (Dr. Mandeep, Dr. Khosla and Professor Nagarjuna) are also included in

this chapter, along with the views of Dr. Narasimha (non-Dalit) and Mr. Shyam (Dalit), who hold high-level government positions.

8.1 The Dalit Caste

This section deals with the Dalit caste. Two observations are crucial in conceptualising and understanding the Dalit community. First, Dalits are divided into more than 900 sub-castes spread across India (D'Souza, 2008; see Chapter 1). Second, social distance is maintained not only between the non-Dalit and Dalit castes, but within the Dalit community itself. Since the Dalit are not a homogeneous group, their community is inclined to “exhibit inner conflicts and schisms” (Sunderaj, 2000, p. 39). It is known, for instance, that Dalits in higher social positions within the caste hierarchy frequently discriminate against members of other Dalit sub-castes whom they consider ‘lower’ than themselves (D'Souza, 2009). With the increased availability of education and socio-economic privileges accessed through the Quota System, some Dalit individuals have been able to improve their socio-economic status. These are known as ‘creamy-layer’ Dalits (Jenkins, 2003; Rana, 2008).

8.1.1. Emergence of the ‘Creamy-Layer’ Dalit

The official definition of the ‘creamy layer’, as proposed by Jenkins (2003), describes those Dalit “individuals who have risen to the top of their community in socio-economic terms” (p. 82; Rana, 2008; see Chapter 1). Over time, the Quota System has generated some social mobility, giving rise to what is referred to in India as a ‘creamy layer’ (elite class) of Dalits. Rana (2008) adds that if a Dalit

individual's "family income exceeds a financial cut-off ceiling [...] his/her family members are treated as 'Creamy-Layer'" (p. 187).

The notion of the creamy layer was slow to emerge in academic circles; its legitimacy was later confirmed by "official committee reports and the judiciary [...] and the concept of 'creamy-layer' was finally given shape by the Supreme Court" (Deshpande, 2008, p. 3). Guru (2005) observes that the term 'Dalit' is often "criticised and disapproved of, particularly by urban [creamy-layer] educated middle-class Dalit" (p. 64). This group of critics considers the 'Dalit' categorisation unfavourable and undesirable, and in opposition to social progress. In their opinion, the term forces them to bear the burden of a historical past they may, at least in part, have escaped (Guru, 2005). Shah (2002) claims that "though they [creamy-layer Dalits] are not as well off as the caste Hindus [non-Dalit] of the same category, some of them, not all, have certainly improved their condition in comparison to other Dalits" (p. 18). Shah points out that those who have "taken advantage of the so-called development programmes in the last five decades" now constitute a part of the 'creamy layer' of Dalits (p. 18).

Articles 16 (4A) and 16 (4B) of India's Constitution stipulate that every eligible Dalit, "howsoever socially advanced, is constitutionally entitled to bid for quota benefits" (Deshpande, 2003, p. 185-186). The creamy layer includes the sons and daughters of Group A (i.e. the professional middle class) and Class 1 (high-ranking) officers of the All-India Central and State Services (Deshpande, 2003). At present, the children and sometimes the grandchildren of creamy-layer Dalits are well placed to benefit from the advantages of high-status schooling and the socio-economic privileges associated with gaining a university place – particularly at a high-status elite university like Shah Jahan. Creamy-layer Dalits are gradually moving farther and farther away—politically, socially, and economically—from the rest of the Dalit population. Their elevated status makes them disinclined to identify with other members of the Dalit caste. However, as

Dalit they are still eligible for the university places and support allotted by the Quota policy, as we shall see.

8.2 Tension between Dalits in Higher Education

The successful implementation of the Quota policy has increased access to higher education for the Dalit community. However, the benefits associated with the Quota scheme have also given rise to conflicts among the Dalit people – especially between creamy-layer Dalits and their less privileged counterparts.

In order to gain a nuanced understanding of the causes of tension within the Dalit community, I will first explore and examine the issues and challenges which have surfaced among the Dalit in relation to the Quota policy, and which impact upon relationships within the Dalit community. The subsequent section will highlight and describe the issues raised by the ‘certification’ procedure used to ‘identify’ Dalits to ensure their eligibility for the government’s Quota privileges. The participants’ responses shed light on the rising tensions between urban ‘creamy-layer’ (usually city-bred) Dalits, and both rural and urban Dalits on partial and full scholarship programmes, who will be referred to as ‘Quota’ Dalits in the course of this chapter.

No official percentage census for the creamy layer is available at present (Rana, 2008). Rana (2008) believes that the “concept of creamy-layer Dalit has to be further examined based on social discrimination between Dalit” (p. 184) – that is, the discrimination which exists between creamy-layer and Quota Dalit individuals. There are growing tensions between the two groups: some Dalit students who have received government scholarships to attend university feel threatened by those from an affluent, creamy-layer background who are still able to benefit from the privileges associated with Quota places. In order to explore these tensions, this

section will detail the issues and challenges foregrounded by the study's participants in their personal reports of student life at the University of Shah Jahan.

8.2.1 Competition for Quota Seats between Dalits in Higher Education – University of Shah Jahan

Weisskopf (2004) claims that there is “evidence that the vast majority of Scheduled Castes [Dalit] [who are] beneficiaries of India’s reservation policies in university admissions do indeed come from a ‘creamy layer’ of the Dalit” (p. 210). Qureshi (2004) is of the view that the “reservation system is being abused”, and that administration and management officials in some states, including Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Bihar, “manipulate recruitment procedures” to favour creamy-layer Dalits (p. 343). However, Rana (2008) argues against the claims made by Weisskopf and Qureshi. Quoting the Chairman of the University Grants Commission (UGC), he points out that no direct evidence has been found that “reservation policies in university admissions have increased overall inequalities, by benefiting well-off Dalits [the creamy layer] [...] at the expense of less well-off [Dalits]” (p. 189). Rana (2008) adds that India's Constitution declares all Dalit caste members to be eligible for the Quota policy: they are “constitutionally entitled to bid for its benefits [...] however, they [the creamy layer] can be skimmed off from the ambit of the Quota [...] only through the modification/revision of the Constitution schedule” (p. 186). One issue that affects the effectiveness of the constitutional Quota policy is the lack of accurate statistics for Dalits’ making use of the Quota seats for higher learning.

In terms of access to university education, the Quota System has certainly benefited both creamy-layer and Quota Dalit students. Nevertheless, the schemes have also given rise to tensions between these two groups. Quota Dalit students believe that the rights of the Dalit to fair and equal treatment in higher education are being

thwarted by the already-privileged creamy-layer Dalit, who are using the Quota scheme to gain a level of access and mobility that they do not need. Dinesh, a Dalit student in the Department of Sociology, commented as follows:

In this university I know of well-to-do Dalit who I believe don't need Quota scholarships [...] yet they secure themselves a Quota scholarship or Quota seat in the medicine and engineering departments. My issue is: if you're well-to-do, give another deprived Dalit the chance to get themselves a reserved seat! [...] I just feel that there are double standards on display within the Dalit community [...] and the fact of the matter is that [...] really no one cares [...] everyone's vying for their own personal benefits. (Interview – 11/09/09)

Dinesh claims that the Dalit creamy layer, like the elite sections of the non-Dalit community, has become complacent, showing disregard for its own caste members – especially when it comes to Quota seats.

Samrat, a Dalit student in the Department of Law, believes that the administration and management operate partially towards students on Quota scholarships:

I'm on a full Quota scholarship in this university and at one point I was asked by the management committee to show my parents' current finances [bank balance] and my grades in order for them to make sure that I deserved it. But my issue is, what about those creamy-layer Dalit who reap the benefits of the Quota scheme in this department? I mean [...] is the management really checking on such students [...] their family income [...] or maybe their grades? I feel the rich Dalit get a privileged deal [...] but then what about those Dalit who come from financially challenged homes? I just think the Quota scheme needs to be strongly monitored [...] it's not fair that the deserving Dalit are left out, and the rich ones [i.e. creamy-layer

Dalit] benefit from Quota advantages in good universities. (Interview – 18/09/09)

Interestingly, Atul, a non-Dalit in the Engineering department, felt the same. He commented:

I know of one particular classmate who is a Dalit. He is bright, well-spoken [...] and is from an affluent background. It was surprising for me to learn later from other close friends of mine that he is on a Quota scholarship. I mean, he comes from a well-off family [...] so why does he need a Quota scholarship, or even a Quota seat [...] isn't it like taking advantage of the system? (Interview – 02/10/09)

Both Samrat (a Dalit) and Atul (a non-Dalit) view the availability of Quota benefits to creamy-layer Dalits as a major problem. In interview, Atul went as far as to contend that the Quota System is being taken advantage of. It is intriguing to note that the issues that Dalit students have with each other are somewhat similar to the concerns they raise about non-Dalit students, especially regarding the problem of merit. Samrat raised an issue particularly pertinent to him: his 'merit' in terms of educational achievement. His concerns hinged on the idea that well-to-do (creamy-layer) Dalit students use up the privileges that should go to poorer and academically brighter Dalits (Quota Dalits) from rural regions. This seems a legitimate anxiety, as the Quota policy is not effectively monitored in this regard.

Anxiety about the allocation of Quota benefits has long affected Quota Dalits, especially those who come from rural regions in India to carry out postgraduate studies in large city universities. Dr. Narasimha, the Vice Chairman of the Minorities Commission for Haryana State, shared his concerns about the issue of rural Dalits who apply for city universities:

Dalit access to university life is a growing problem in this city. Those Dalit who are financially privileged and those Dalit with Quota scholarships gain access to universities [...] however [...] the rural Dalit graduates who have migrated into this city from small towns suffer major setbacks. Firstly, they do not know how best to deal with city life. Secondly, even if the rural Dalit finds his/her way onto the university campus [...] the university management and administration are not quick to attend to them, due to their identity as Dalit. Thirdly, the urban Dalit [often members of the creamy layer] seldom assist rural Dalit, due to internal caste and class differences among Dalits [...] these are major hurdles within the Dalit community even today. (Interview – 02/10/09)

The Quota scheme has no doubt been a practical and desirable – indeed essential – measure for the development and integration of the Dalit community into mainstream society (Deshpande, 2008). However, some groups within this community have not always been able to take advantage of the Quota policies. Schism has taken root within the Dalit community, leading to some disunity between creamy-layer and Quota Dalit students. Dr. Narasimha's concerns confirm the reality of the challenges that remain for Dalit students, which he believes to be eroding the notion of equal rights for which the Quota System once stood for. It is clear that internal differences have affected the Dalit community, and may be slowly setting its individual members in opposition to one another.

Mr. Shyam, a senior government policy maker for state higher education, pointed out that the growing resentment felt by the creamy-layer Dalit for the rural Dalit, and vice versa, may also be the result of the mismanagement of the Quota by university administration:

University administration and management play a vital role in supporting the constitutional Quota policies for Dalit students. All colleges and

universities are required by law to uphold the 15% allocation for Dalit students and are therefore required to implement the reservation policy. However, there is a growing division between urban [creamy-layer] Dalit and those less privileged [Quota] Dalit who have migrated from small towns from other Indian states to this city in the past years. The latter contend that the seats in the departments of medicine, engineering and business don't meet the required 15% Quota allotment [...] one mostly finds there non-Dalit students and other Dalit students who come from affluent backgrounds [i.e. creamy-layer Dalit]. So [...] there is prejudice against those less privileged Dalit who are not admitted into sought-after departments [...] and this becomes a problem. The non-Dalit higher authorities responsible for the Quota System have to deal with this challenge – the bottom line is the question of how and when this issue will be taken into serious consideration. (Interview – 18/09/09)

The Quota System allots a proportion of seats to assist the Dalit community's access to higher education; however, a greater number of creamy-layer Dalit seem to have benefited from the Quota reservations and entered the portals of higher education than their less privileged counterparts within the Dalit community. Mr. Shyam is aware of the fact that creamy-layer Dalit individuals continue to gain from these policies. He blames the failure of government administration to exercise controls over the Quota policy, and highlights the government's lack of support and refusal to admit responsibility for ensuring the sustainable and equitable allocation of Quota seats for different cohorts of Dalit students.

The Quota scheme to promote Dalit access to further studies has, in part, been made viable through the government's support for the process of Scheduled Caste certification, which designates a Dalit individual as belonging to the Dalit caste, and thus confirms their eligibility to receive Quota benefits (Keane, 2007). However,

the Scheduled Caste certificate poses diverse challenges to the Dalit, which will be explored and analysed closely in the subsequent section.

8.2.2 Scheduled Caste (Dalit) Certificate: Tensions and Conflicts Surrounding the Certification Process for Quota Seats in University Education

Scheduled Caste (Dalit) certification, whereby a certificate issued by the government's Scheduled Caste Cell designates individuals as eligible for Quota seats in further and higher education, is an important process for Dalit wishing to avail themselves of support (Keane, 2007). Dinesh, a Dalit student in the Department of Sociology, shared some information on the certification process:

I have a certificate that confirms my Dalit background. If Dalit students seek to use the Quota reservation, this can only be done by acquiring a certificate from the government's Scheduled Caste [Dalit] Cell upon the provision of substantial evidence of the caste affiliation of one's family, one's place of origin [which *Talukah* (district), for example], one's family history, and/or one's village. After providing this evidence, the Dalit student is given a certificate which allows him/her to acquire the Quota benefits in further education. (Interview – 11/09/09)

Apart from the benefits relating to higher education, the certificate qualifies Dalit individuals for reserved employment, or to hold reserved legislative seats, and is thus very important and valuable. Eighteen different officials in different regions and states in India are authorised to issue Scheduled Caste (Dalit) certificates (Jenkins, 2003).

As Jenkins (2003) claims, however, the process of identity verification associated with caste certificates in particular “tend[s] to burden and stigmatize disadvantaged

(Dalit) groups” (p. 67). In other words, the administration of Quota reservations confirms that, although the policies might be empowering, the process is not. While the reservations offer opportunities to Dalit individuals, the procedures associated with reservation are notably insecure. For example, Rajeev, a Dalit student from the Department of Management, shared his concerns about a problem that seems likely to worsen further:

Dalit are granted certificates as proof that they are Dalit [...] and this allows us to make use of the Quota allocations [...] however [...] this is not always the case [...] certificates may be bogus [...] and yes they can be bought by those who have the financial privileges to do so. (Interview – 28/08/09)

Counterfeit certificates, and the dishonest issuing of certificates, inevitably pose a serious threat to the Dalit community. In order to explain the lack of Dalit candidates admitted into educational institutions at the higher levels, Keane (2007) suggests that “caste Hindus with false Scheduled Castes certificates are squeezing out real Scheduled Caste (Dalit) members” (p. 253). Such behaviour could have a considerable negative impact on the access of all Dalit people to universities. Non-Dalits have been known to pose as Dalits, thus misusing the Dalit certification scheme to increase their personal educational mobility; and Rajeev highlights the fact that such deceptive, shady schemes could thwart Dalit access to universities.

Some of the Dalit respondents suggested that creamy-layer Dalits have at times made exploitative use of the certificates to acquire higher educational benefits, in spite of the affluent economic and social backgrounds they share with their non-Dalit counterparts. As Samrat, a Dalit from the Department of Law, said:

Some Dalit come from privileged homes but portray themselves as coming from low-income families in order to acquire the Dalit certificate for Quota seats [...]. It is easy to demand Dalit certification on the basis of being a

Dalit [...] and as a Constitutional right. The more needy Dalit students are not able to acquire the benefits because the creamy-layer Dalit students have snatched away the places of more deserving, not-so-privileged Dalit candidates who really need the Quota's assistance. (Interview – 18/09/09)

The eligibility of creamy-layer Dalits for the reservation system has been challenged, especially in terms of income criteria. Rana (2008) claims that it may be possible for creamy-layer Dalits to acquire false income certificates, since the educational management has “no counter check system, or even if such counter checks are available, [given] the present administrative system and the level of efficiency with which it is functioning, it is almost impossible to ensure strict adherence to income criteria” (p. 188). As a result, many creamy-layer Dalit take maximum advantage of the Quota policy. As time has passed, the explicit objectives of the Quota reservation policy have been obscured and exploited by economically well-off Dalits who have nonetheless used it to obtain university places. Samrat's above-quoted remarks highlight the effect of such behaviour on the educational aspirations of deserving Dalit students.

Anil, a Dalit student in the Department of History, also argued against the misuse of privileges by creamy-layer Dalits:

I have a problem with well-off Dalits who have acquired the privileges of good education and an affluent lifestyle [...] and who are still able to qualify for a Dalit certificate [...] allowing them to be part of the Quota scheme like any other economically challenged Dalit student. I feel that poor Dalits should be given the benefits of the Quota scheme as opposed to the well-off Dalit students. (Interview – 10/07/09)

As the Dalit participants attest, creamy-layer Dalits continue to be perceived as the undeserving recipients of the Quota benefits. Indeed, Kumar (2008) believes that

the “creamy-layer Dalit have taken advantage of this explicit objective” of the Quota scheme (p. 4). Although the arguments above make serious claims for Quota inequality, it could also be argued that the Quota policies were initially designed to improve the access of all Dalits (whether creamy-layer or Quota) to higher education, as a measure to improve their social and economic progress. Rajesh, a creamy-layer Dalit in the Engineering department at Shah Jahan, presented his views on the Quota System’s benefits:

I believe that the Dalit certificate for the Quota System is for all Dalit students [...] whether rich or poor. Admission to engineering is competitive in this university [...] and I’m up against many non-Dalit students who are from grammar schools, and are far more affluent and privileged [...] and who have much more promising prospects, given their non-Dalit caste, than I do. I have earned the very good grades necessary for my admission into this department [...] and since the competition is really stiff here [...] I find it fair that as a Dalit I too need to make use of the Quota privileges that are allotted to me as well as to other Dalit students. (Interview – 31/07/09)

Rajesh contends that, in the interests of fairness, the privileges allotted by Scheduled Caste (Dalit) certification should be available to both creamy-layer and poorer Dalit students. He asserts that the certificate is a practical and indeed essential measure to ensure the progress and integration of all Dalit people within mainstream education.

Another issue of contention in Indian society involves the structural constraints imposed by the social system at large, wherein non-Dalit administrators and management play a prominent role. One of the faculty participants in this study expressed anxiety relating to the Scheduled Caste certificate for Dalit females. Dr. Mandeep, a Dalit female faculty member in the Department of Psychology,

believes that the fairness of Quota access has been obstructed by administrative and management heads, especially for Dalit females:

The certification process does not ensure Dalit students' access to Quota privileges. At times the Dalit certificate is ignored and overlooked by the university administrators. There is no guarantee [...] as I've come across Dalit female candidates who have been victims of such rejection on the basis that the upper management are not in the least bothered about the Dalit certificate. (Interview – 04/09/09)

Rajawat (2004) claims that “administrators do perpetuate discrimination through their own internalized caste values [...] posing a threat to the achievement of Dalit students” (p.113). In this light, Dr. Mandeep makes a valid observation about the certification process. Yet although such unfairness may be expected of high-caste non-Dalit management in university administration (Kumar, 2002), the conflict between creamy-layer and Quota Dalits regarding Scheduled Caste certification for Quota seats at the university level poses an even greater threat to the unity of the Dalit community.

8.3 Characteristics of the Lives of Dalit at the University of Shah Jahan

In the previous section, I highlighted and described the concerns surrounding Scheduled Caste certification, and described some of the tensions that exist between creamy-layer and Quota Dalit students, especially in the light of the use of the Quota policy for educational access. Historical and social forces continue to influence the nature of the relationships between members of the Dalit caste. In this section, I will examine the processes of social change affecting the Dalit caste, paying particular attention to the growing challenges that disturb relationships between the privileged members of the creamy layer and their Quota colleagues in

higher education. This section will entail consideration of various aspects of the social, economic, and educational lives of Dalit participants studying at the University of Shah Jahan.

8.3.1 Creamy-layer Dalit versus Quota Dalit Students: Issues and Challenges Faced in their Experience of Higher Education

According to Rao (2009), there is growing concern about the problem of “conflict among Dalit groups, especially [...] emergent distinctions between urban and rural Dalits” (p. 185). Increased economic security, along with the corresponding social prestige acquired over decades, has enabled the emergence of a new “class of Dalits that is vastly better off, socially conscious and more politically aware” (Guru & Chakravarty, 2005, p. 138). In the cities, modernisation and increased access to formal and higher education have, among other factors, contributed to the emergence of this ‘creamy-layer’ Dalit class, inspiring new hopes and aspirations (Kumar, 2002). This transformation has led to a growing divide between the creamy-layer (usually urban) Dalit and the Quota Dalit (rural/urban and less privileged), according to differences in caste prestige (i.e. sub-caste hierarchies) and class differences. As a result, problems of adjustment in relating to other groups frequently arise within the Dalit community, at both an individual and a social level. For instance, there are clashes between Quota Dalits and creamy-layer Dalits regarding access to higher education: if a Quota Dalit proves unable to meet the standards for higher degree learning, then the “Quota seats get taken by economically well-to-do and educationally able creamy-layer urban Dalit students” (Singh and Malik, 2001, p. 217). According to Kumar (2002), this situation has gradually diminished the aspirations of Quota Dalit students, as they are forced to “compete for the utilization of opportunities against their Dalit counterparts through Quota reservation policy” (p. 159). This development has widened the gap between Quota Dalits and creamy-layer Dalits.

The problem was addressed by Mr. Shyam, a Dalit and a senior government official for state policy in higher education, who commented that:

A Dalit born and raised in the city is in a better position to access higher education than a Dalit who is from a small town from a different state. There is increasing prejudice against small-town Dalit people as compared to city-born Dalit. Such practices are creating issues of schism within [...] and deviation from the Dalit caste. (Interview – 18/09/09)

The Quota policies intended for ‘upliftment’ have resulted in additional, pressing problems which have given rise to unrest and protest within the Dalit community. If, as we have seen, considerable differences exist between the non-Dalit and Dalit castes, the limitations of the Quota scheme have generated complex tensions within the Dalit community itself. As a result, members of the creamy-layer Dalit class have begun to associate themselves with non-Dalits, and to distance themselves from individuals of their own caste and community. Anand, a creamy-layer Dalit student in the Department of Management, spoke of this dilemma as follows:

In this University (Shah Jahan) I’ve come across Dalit individuals who are well-to-do and prefer not to associate with the Dalit community [...] but prefer to connect with non-Dalit and want to feel like them. (Interview – 31/08/09)

Anand’s experience corroborates D’Souza’s (2009) view that prosperous Dalits “literally turn their back on their fellow men” (p. 43). Creamy-layer Dalits, having a distinct edge over other members of their community, are more inclined to associate themselves with equivalently placed persons from other, non-Dalit castes; and have at times begun to exploit their own caste. Such an attitude affects feelings of kinship between creamy-layer and poorer Dalit; and thus, over time, Dalit unity has been eroded. This dilemma has impacted upon the Dalit community at large.

Creamy-layer Dalit students tend to form exclusive groups or friendships within the university setting. Anil, a Dalit student in the Department of History, believes that this is prevalent in the University of Shah Jahan as a whole:

There is this group thing among Dalit here [i.e. the University of Shah Jahan]: I find that Dalit distance themselves from each other. Often creamy-layer Dalit prefer to hang out with other creamy-layer Dalit, or non-Dalit [...] I would say [...] who are in that class! [...] In my own experience I have encountered creamy-layer Dalit who prefer not to associate with Quota Dalit students as they consider themselves of a 'higher' status due to good schooling and economic affluence. This attitude continues to be conspicuous in our community today. (Interview – 10/07/09)

One may not always fully grasp the complex relationships that structure the Dalit community. Some creamy-layer Dalits, with their privileged educational and family backgrounds, consider themselves equal to non-Dalit individuals. Rajawat (2004) believes that the “notion of superiority and inferiority exists so long as the hierarchy prevails” within the Dalit community (p. 58). As a result, whether consciously or subconsciously, the creamy-layer Dalit continue to form privileged groups in which they are comfortable, and perpetuate their internalised bias against other, less privileged Dalit students.

Another factor contributing to the division between creamy-layer Dalit and Quota Dalit seems to have grown steadily. With an increase in economic development and individuals' personal drive for success, a strong sense of educational competition has emerged within the creamy-layer Dalit class. Rather than working together in a unified manner with Quota Dalit students, members of the creamy layer are individualistic and seem to prefer to separate themselves from other factions within their community. Lalit, a Dalit student in the Department of Law, described the

competition and jealousy that are increasingly evident among the creamy-layer Dalit:

Many Dalits want to study in this university. Competition is fierce between the Dalits too. There are clashes between ‘creamy-layer’ Dalit and the less well-off Dalit. Along with competition the issue of jealousy is also an important element to consider. Usually creamy-layer Dalits have received good schooling, and are well spoken [...] unlike the not-so-well-off Dalit who have studied at local government schools. So, the Quota benefits [...] in terms of who should receive them [...] are always challenged by the creamy-layer Dalit [...] this issue is growing rather quickly and is creating a rift within the Dalit student community. (Interview – 28/08/09)

As mentioned in earlier chapters (Chapters 3 and 6), the Indian government has failed in its attempts to ensure and protect respect for equality, especially in terms of its management of the Quota policy and the policy’s general outcomes for the Dalit community. Lalit’s comments highlight the intense competition that exists between creamy-layer Dalit and Quota Dalit students, and the invisible wall that separates them. Furthermore, Dr. Narasimha, Vice-Chairman of the State Minorities Commission, who has been an advocate for Dalit rights at the level of government, revealed another issue that he considers an increasing problem within the Dalit community:

The Constitutional laws are in place to protect Dalits’ right to education through the Quota [...] however, internal dissent in the Dalit caste is gaining ground. How this is happening is that [...] Dalit individuals strive to work hard to be successful on their own. So each person is out to achieve the best. This approach has led to a ‘selfish’ attitude, in which competition for personal gain has taken precedence over a ‘selfless’ attitude towards fellow Dalit. This is a significant threat to the Dalit community, and is

spreading at an ever-faster rate [...] this might adversely affect the government's attempts to assist the Dalit community in its members' educational endeavours. (Interview – 02/10/09)

Even though the Quota policy prioritises Dalit access to education, it seems that internal schisms within the Dalit community have taken root. Dr. Narasimha believes that this 'selfish' attitude within competitive surroundings (especially in a large city) has a negative impact on the relationships between Dalit students, hindering the pursuit of any common goal (equality, social justice, etc.) on behalf of their caste community as a whole. In fact, such a schism also highlights caste dynamics on a larger scale, as well as exposing internal caste differences within the Dalit community.

8.4 Caste Divisions between Dalit Students in the University Environment

The emergence of these two main groups (creamy-layer and Quota Dalits) has had a considerable impact on the collective sense of being a Dalit, shaking the caste's social/communal coherence. As well as the tensions that exist between the creamy-layer class and the Quota Dalits in the situation under examination (i.e. in the University of Shah Jahan), we must also consider the broader concern of caste differences and internal schisms that prevail within the Dalit community. To this end, the Dalit participants in this research offered to share some of their experiences of the tensions relating to caste bias (especially between sub-castes) among the Dalit people. In this section, therefore, I will highlight some of the caste tensions that continue to prevail within the Dalit community, and share the experiences and views of those Dalit participants who feel that such internal biases could stand as a potential threat to the unity established within this caste by Dr. Ambedkar (see Chapter 1).

8.4.1 The Dalit: Internal Caste Divisions and Differences

Caste is a fundamental reality of contemporary India. As Rana (2008) points out, “caste discrimination exists both outside and within the Dalit community” (p. 180). With the existence of about 900 Dalit sub-castes, a considerable degree of social distance is maintained between Dalits (Sunderaj, 2000; D’Souza, 2009). Professor Nagarjuna, a Dalit in the Department of Sociology, described the extent of this distance:

Caste hierarchy prevails within the Dalit community [...] and the treatment of a Dalit person is based upon what caste group they belong to. The lower your caste affiliation in the Dalit group, the greater the chance of your being exploited and marginalised. (Interview – 05/10/09)

Rajawat (2004) believes that each “caste and sometimes even each sub-caste is allowed to cultivate its distinctive styles of life” (p. 87). From the views expressed by the participants in this research, it is evident that the various forms of caste-based oppression are linked, and should thus be understood within the broader context of caste identity (Bettcher, 2007).

Dr. Khosla, a Dalit and a faculty member in the Department of Education, shared his thoughts on the Dalit sub-castes:

Many sub-castes exist within the Dalit [caste...] and caste hierarchy prevails within the Dalit community. Dalit individuals who consider themselves higher [...] hold similar prejudices to those which non-Dalit high-castes hold against Dalit people. I’m sad to witness that this attitude continues to prevail, and indeed is becoming stronger. (Interview – 03/08/09)

Both faculty members, Professor Nagarjuna and Dr. Khosla, believe that when one caste or sub-caste is lower than another, the likelihood that an individual will be privileged or sidelined depends on that individual's caste or sub-caste affiliation. Lalit, a Dalit student in the Department of Law, shared a similar sense of unease:

The tensions between Dalit and non-Dalit in terms of caste bias [...] have sadly taken root within the Dalit community too [...] and this at present is impacting on the Quota and Dalits' educational progress. (Interview – 28/08/09)

The possibility of Quota status was granted to the Dalit community with a view to advancing their educational lives (Rana, 2008). However, Lalit's perception of the internal divides among Dalits caused by growing sub-caste bias may warn of a major hurdle to Dalit progress in the future. Internal caste issues, especially among the Dalit sub-castes, seem to have become more prominent with time, despite conscious efforts having been made to curb the prevailing caste bias within the Dalit community. One would think that individuals belonging to a common caste would feel close to one another without having to make a conscious effort. The views and experiences shared by the Dalit respondents in the course of this study indicate that there are many reasons for the tension between creamy-layer and Quota scholarship Dalits at Shah Jahan. Given the existing Dalit sub-caste rivalries, and the conflict between the Quota Dalit and the creamy-layer Dalit, as well as the influx of rural Dalits to the cities for higher educational purposes, it is unsurprising that these differences have been causing problems within the Dalit community. Vimal, a female Dalit student in the Department of Law, shared a similar view:

Caste bias exists within the Dalit caste too. I find it weird [...] I mean [...] we argue against the caste system and its discriminatory patterns, and against the privileged status of the non-Dalit [...] and yet within the Dalit community we hold the same caste-biased attitudes. (Interview – 25/09/09)

It is evident that members of the Dalit caste have suffered, and continue to suffer, as a result of caste bias directed against them by the non-Dalit community. When the same or similar forms of bias are prevalent within the Dalit caste, however, the internal dynamics determining how one Dalit individual will treat another become still more complex. Vimal claims that the hierarchical principles of the caste system are firmly entrenched within the Dalit community. She addresses what she sees as the hypocrisy of members of the Dalit group who seek to distance themselves from their own people, and shares her difficulty in understanding the marginalisation that goes on within the Dalit caste.

Chetan, a Dalit studying in the Department of Psychology, shared his experience of marginalising attitudes among Dalit sub-castes:

One may think that [...] yes! [...] this other Dalit individual will be friendly [...] but in reality that is not the case. I know for a fact that [...] after the other Dalit learns [...] maybe in a conversation, what sub-caste you belong to [...] it will always be the case that I belong to so-and-so caste [...] and you belong to so-and-so sub-caste [...] this clearly shows that I'm higher than you [...] and you are lower than me. (Interview – 24/07/09)

From Chetan's comments, one might infer that in such instances the Dalit abandon their own caste mores and take on the attitudes of the high-caste non-Dalit, adopting the latter's way of life by embracing their customs, culture and traditions (Rajawat, 2004). Indeed, this is becoming increasingly common, as confirmed by Dr. Narasimha, Vice-Chairman of the Minorities Commission, who spoke on the growing differences within the Dalit caste caused by the willingness of many to perpetuate the same kind of caste-biased attitudes as those held by non-Dalit individuals:

There are those Dalit who are of a higher sub-caste [...] they form a large part of the creamy-layer who come from affluent homes and have gained the privileges of good education, social and economic privileges [...] and then you have the lower sub-caste Dalit who have grown up in the city, and also those who have migrated here [the city] from rural towns and villages in search of better prospects. With such an amalgamation [...] the Dalit creamy-layer and other higher sub-caste Dalits have started to maintain divisions between their Dalit counterparts [...] which slowly and steadily are gaining momentum [...] and this is challenging their unity. (Interview – 02/10/09)

Since non-Dalit students are advantageously placed by their caste, they are able to exercise a degree of social power; and in this way too, to express some form of bias. Such biased attitudes perpetuate and amplify unfairness, contributing to the exclusion of Dalit individuals even in a premier university setting. Mr. Shyam, a senior government policy maker in the higher education sector, agreed:

There are rising tensions among the Dalit. Internal rivalries on the basis of sub-caste affiliations within the Dalit community could in the long run hold back the progress of many aspiring Dalit individuals who want to further their education. Many of the tensions I see affect the everyday lives of the Dalit, whether at work or in educational institutions. Creamy-layer Dalit who have grown up in this city, and those Dalit who belong to the higher sub-caste, consider themselves superior to the poorer, lower Dalit sub-castes in every way. (Interview – 18/09/09)

Caste background plays a large role in determining an individual's future. Another important point raised by Mr. Shyam is the degree to which caste difference and bias affect Dalits' everyday lives. Some of the acts of caste bias committed by the creamy-layer Dalit reveal their inclination towards the maintenance of caste

hierarchy. In Jain's (2005) view, this kind of systematic sidelining is drawing attention to the "trend of caste-derived prejudice" (p. 38) which is so often mobilised in the situations described by the research participants.

8.5 Emerging Concerns for Dalits in Higher Education

In this section, I will explore these inter-Dalit issues with particular reference to the setting of the University of Shah Jahan, and examine some of the issues that arise from Dalits' interpersonal relationships with other Dalits. Firstly, this section identifies the internal caste/class differences that seem particularly acute among Dalits. Secondly, it highlights the influence of competition on Dalits' relationships with each other. Thirdly, it discusses the significance of regional and language differences; and finally raises concerns about Dalit unity in light of the differences that seem to define their attitudes towards one another.

8.5.1 Class Differences between Dalit Students

Rajeev, a Dalit in the Department of Management, was of the view that sharing the 'Dalit' identity does not make all Dalits the same. He described the diversity of the Dalit community at Shah Jahan articulately:

In this university there are Dalit from different economic and social backgrounds [...] as well as in different academic departments. I mean [...] not all Dalit identify with each other just because they are 'Dalit' [...] each one is different. So [...] tensions do prevail because there are class differences [...] there are those who studied at good grammar schools [...]

and in this university I have seen that Dalit from privileged backgrounds prefer to mix with Dalit who are like them. (Interview – 28/08/09)

Here is a complex account of caste marginalisation sustained by class differences. The class system in this case is framed as a hierarchy in which each sub-caste is considered better or higher than another. As seen in earlier chapters (Chapters 5, 6, and 7), such issues of difference are also common among non-Dalit individuals. In his response, Rajeev reveals the existence of class divisions between the Dalit at Shah Jahan. Vimal, a Dalit female in the Department of Law, elaborated upon the issue of caste-class hierarchy:

I belong to a certain Dalit sub-caste [...] so caste hierarchy is there. Also [...] issues of class differences are present, with a hierarchical structure [...] and you can't ignore that in my community today. One can witness in this university that creamy-layer Dalit who belong to a better economic and social class are often on better subject courses, too. The issue of caste and class status has also given rise to competition between the Dalit. (Interview – 25/09/09)

The influence of caste is strong and pervasive in Indian society. It hampers social mobility and divides and sub-divides people even further (Mishra, 2001). Vimal reports that social differentiation within the Dalit community in Shah Jahan is based on the conception of caste-class norms that assign division; and that the resulting structural separation hampers social ties. Competition then becomes a pivotal social force, driving individuals on to contend for success and achievement. This aspect of caste division will be analysed in the subsequent section.

8.5.2 Educational Competition

In one of the news item that had been previously broadcasted on Indian television ‘*Live India*’ as Mandal (2003) points out, highlighted the growing differences that afflict today’s Dalit community. First, the news item reported that educated Dalit do not treat uneducated caste members as equals. Secondly, and unsurprisingly, it pointed out that rich Dalit do not mingle with poorer groups. Lastly, it found that urban Dalit treat rural sub-castes differently. Dr. Khosla, a Dalit faculty member in the education department at Shah Jahan, confirmed the existence of such practices within the Dalit community:

Unfortunately, given the rise of educated and economically well-off Dalit, there seems to be a growing friction between the highly educated Dalit and the less educated ones. Status-conscious Dalit today look down upon their fellow Dalit who have not measured up to their standards. There is growing discrimination and segregation within the Dalit community. The attitude that “if I’ve made it on my own, so can they” is common amongst many Dalit in this city. Given this attitude, as I’ve mentioned before I think Dalit individuals perpetrating this form of discrimination like their non-Dalit counterparts should be closely analysed. (Interview – 03/08/09)

In recent years, some members of the Dalit community have protested in favour of “reorganizing the government’s Quota educational policy to fit the needs of different sub-castes” within the Dalit caste, instead of directing the Quota automatically to the affluent creamy-layer Dalits (Rao, 2007, pp. 164-65). In comparison with Dalit in urban cities, rural Dalit have much less access to higher education: if rural Dalit are unable to succeed in higher degree learning, then their Quota seats are taken by economically well-to-do urban creamy-layer Dalit students, or non-Dalit (Singh and Malik, 2001). Certainly, Dalit students enrolled in

elite higher educational institutions in India go on to successful careers with much greater frequency than they would have done in the absence of the Quota policies. However, this is not true of rural Dalit, who are frequently denied access to such education, and instead go on to fail economically and professionally. Many are excluded from the processes of development and modernisation altogether, due to their rural village background and the traditional stigma of their low-caste birthright (Weiskopf, 2004).

Rajeev, a Dalit in the Department of Management, described a troubling attitude he has observed among members of his own caste:

Once a Dalit has progressed in their life after going through challenging and hard experiences [...] it seems to come quite naturally to think, 'I have proved myself on my own...so could the other person'. This sort of attitude may seem right to the person who thinks this way [...] but it does lead to further divisions within the Dalit community, because then one does not care for others. (Interview – 28/08/09)

Rajeev's observations cut right to the heart of the 'each to his own' attitude. He describes a situation in which the culture of academic competition significantly influences an individual's self-image and desire for personal success. In such cases, therefore, the culture of individualism and competition is internalised, challenging the traditionally communitarian values of the Dalit (Rajawat, 2003). In fact, this competitive attitude begins to undermine the fundamental qualities of the Dalit community – unity and the willingness to support one another.

A significant segment of the Indian population has striven to become what are known as 'Dalit Brahmins' (Kapoor, 2007). To achieve this amalgamated class identity, they seek actively to acquire the attitudes of the new class. They begin to distance themselves from their close relatives. Kapoor (2007) is of the view that this

“distance satisfies a psychological need and they feel happy that they are part of the dominant class” (p. 87). However, the Dalit participants in this research argued vociferously against such attitudes, pointing out that the assumption that ‘I’m better than you’ generates a kind of exclusion even within Dalit households. Professor Nagarjuna, a Dalit faculty member in the Department of Sociology, further elaborated on the issue of caste and class divisions within the Dalit community:

Factions within the Dalit caste have been prevalent for some time, but today [...] it is getting even worse. On one side you have the emerging ‘creamy-layer’ class [...] and on the other you have small-town and village Dalit who have migrated to the city from all over India in pursuit of better lives and education. Dalits born and bred in the cities are utterly different from Dalits from a small village. I see this distinction even amongst Dalit students in this university. The difference between the creamy-layer and the rural Dalit is clearly demarcated. And this attitude has gained more momentum [...] we are now noticing that the Dalit who face a negative attitude from non-Dalit are inflicting the same kind of bias on their own fellow people [...] and this problem will get worse and worse in the years to come. (Interview – 05/10/09)

Dinesh, a Dalit student in the Department of Sociology, spoke of the problems which Professor Nagarjuna believes to have gained momentum in the Dalit community:

Dalit students in every department are different [...] I’ve come across Dalit students from engineering, management or law courses who consider themselves more important than other Dalit who are not part of those [higher-status] courses. I mean [...] in this case it is always ‘I’m better than you...and you are not in my league’. This attitude is growing and it prevails strongly here. (Interview – 11/09/09)

In light of Dinesh's view of his fellow creamy-layer Dalit students, it seemed worth posing a direct question to Rajesh, a creamy-layer Dalit student in the Department of Engineering. I asked whether, in his opinion, creamy-layer Dalit really behave in a biased manner to those Dalit who do not come from privileged families. His reply was as follows:

I believe I'm not biased against the not-so-privileged Dalit. As a Dalit myself I know that I could fall victim to non-Dalit caste prejudices either in my department or elsewhere. However [...] I want to mention that in this university [...] as far as I understand [...] I find myself mixing with a few Dalit from the medicine and engineering departments [...] because I feel comfortable talking to them. Since me and my friends are all from this city and share the same lingo [common city language and slang], we understand each other. Whereas [...] if a Dalit person is from a rural area or another region in India [...] it would be quite natural for me not to mix easily with them [...] because we are different in many respects [...]. I feel most comfortable with those from the same region as I am. (Interview – 31/07/09)

Rajesh's remarks require closer attention, as his view reflects an important aspect of social relations among Dalits at Shah Jahan. He reflects upon the nature of personal differentiation based on language and region, both of which play an important role in characterising an individual in his/her methods of socialising with others. In light of this vital factor, the subsequent section will analyse the role and interplay of language and region in the life of a Dalit individual.

8.5.3 Regional and Language Divisions between Dalit Students

Since there is a diverse range of Dalit students at the University of Shah Jahan, regional and language differences inevitably play a crucial role in their social bonding and development of relationships. Such divisions, however, have become a growing concern. One aspect of internal differentiation among Dalit individuals was highlighted by Lalit, a Dalit student in the Department of Law. He made a crucial point about the issue of linguistic/regional differences:

There are Dalit students in this university who come from different states and regions of India. Some have their own language and regional dialects [...] and such Dalit prefer to bond with those who speak the same language [...] or are from the same state or region, and they may not particularly feel connected to those Dalit who are from a different state or region [...] in such cases one should consider that the Dalit community in India is diverse.
(Interview – 28/08/09)

As Lalit observes, the importance of language and regional differences often goes unconsidered when we try to understand the Dalit caste. There is sometimes a tendency to compartmentalise members of the Dalit caste into one category – ‘Dalit’ – thereby precluding attention to the many, diverse and different aspects of this community at large, which is represented in diverse locations spread across the Indian sub-continent.

Pankaj, a creamy-layer Dalit student studying in the Department of Chemistry, shared his views with clarity:

It is not to be expected that I will necessarily get along well with another Dalit. I mean [...] we may be Dalit [...] but I’m from a different region,

with different religious beliefs [...] and speak a different language [...] so I may prefer to be with someone who I can connect with easily and with whom I share some commonalities. (Interview – 06/08/09)

Again, Pankaj highlights the differences between Dalit individuals – an aspect that requires further attention. His view differs starkly from many of the other views and experiences described by the participants in this study. He highlights the roles of language, religion and region in characterising a Dalit individual as ‘different’ from another Dalit. Patterns of social relationships (such as common language, religion, region, etc.) could therefore be distinguished as the most pervasive kind of social groupings among Dalits. Anand, a creamy-layer Dalit in the Department of Management, made a similar point:

There are many Dalit in the university [...] but each one is different. If a person is born and bred in this city, they are part of the city’s culture and language. I’m from this city so I speak the dialect and can connect to a Dalit from this city. But [...] if a Dalit has come from another state or region in India to study at this university [...] they bring with them their own language and culture [...] and each prefers to connect with their own. As a result, groupings of Dalit are formed [...] since Dalit from a similar state or region, or who speak the same language, are more comfortable with one another and therefore connect more closely. (Interview – 31/08/09)

Anand recognises the diversity of the Dalit caste. In his view, region and language play a dominant part in the processes of socialisation and communication among Dalits at Shah Jahan. At some level, his comments indicate that Dalit prefer to be in the company of those Dalit individuals who share similar comfort zones, such as a shared region and language. When viewed critically, however, this heterogeneous behaviour seems likely to impact adversely on the unity and cohesiveness of the Dalit caste. That is, if Dalit students maintain a closeness with other Dalits from the

same place and with the same language, this may exclude other Dalit students who do not come from the same region or speak the same language. Indeed, such attitudes have led to further tensions in Dalits' interactions with each other.

8.5.4 Challenges to Dalit Unity

Samrat, a Dalit student in the Department of Law, expressed a view similar to that of the participants previously quoted:

If Dalit compete against other Dalit for university places, tension is bound to build between the two. Such rivalry does exist within the Dalit community. I mean [...] it's not about trying to help another Dalit person [...] its all about 'how am I going to secure that place for myself?' There is no 'camaraderie' in the case of a Dalit student [...] it is competition between one person and the next to attain a place for themselves at university. In such cases Dalit unity is challenged within the community.
(Interview – 18/09/09)

It is interesting to note, in contrast, Rajawat's (2004) belief that "competition is something alien to Dalit culture" (p. 111). While Rajawat's claim is worth considering, Samrat's comments suggest quite the opposite. Fernandes (2003) believes that "caste and class issues coincide" in the case of Dalits' competing for university places (p. 46). It should be noted that this rivalry is particularly evident if some creamy-layer Dalits are brought up with competitive values and a sense of the importance of achieving for personal gain.

Lalit, a Dalit in the Department of Law and a senior representative of Dalit students in the University of Shah Jahan, confirmed that he had come across such segregationist attitudes among the Dalit student population:

I try to bring all Dalit together for formal and informal meetings to discuss the issues that face us during university life. However even when we do have such gatherings [...] it is quite evident in the group that there is no oneness as such [...] each individual has his/her own agenda and outlook on certain things [...] and Dalit students who are financially better off prefer not to be a part of such gatherings. (Interview – 28/08/09)

Lalit highlights the schism that has already developed and is significantly reshaping the Dalit communitarian culture (Rajawat, 2004). Paswan and Jaideva (2003) suggest that the “Scheduled Castes [Dalit] aspire to an elevation in their social status through the rejection of their traditional caste occupations and other practices” (p. 353; D’Souza, 2009). In some sense, then, according to this view, the creamy-layer Dalit wish to exercise their sense of individuality by removing themselves from the Dalit community. They want neither to be a part of, nor to be identified with, the Dalit caste identity that lies at the heart of their problems in society – yet this identity still offers some advantages in accessing high-status university places. This self-identification as the ‘Dalit elite’ was manifested clearly, and in a variety of ways, by the creamy-layer Dalit participants in this research study.

However, as there may also be important differences in perspective or context. For example, Sheela, a creamy-layer Dalit female from the Department of Engineering, questioned the significance attributed specifically to sub-caste differences within an already diverse community:

Dalit unity is compromised on many levels. Each Dalit person thinks and acts differently. Some Dalit belong to different sub-caste groups [...] some come from different schooling systems, some from privileged and some from not-so-privileged homes. With such diversity [...] one is bound to find a sense of separateness or lack of unity due to diverse individual characteristics. (Interview – 05/10/09)

In distinguishing between the various differences that exist within the Dalit group at large, Sheela makes an important observation. Although unity exists between like-minded Dalit, or those from similar places, or who speak the same language, on a larger scale it is evident that there are considerable differences between and among Dalit groups, which compromise the unity of their community on many levels – not solely according to caste.

8.6 Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter has sought to explore the experiences of Dalit individuals with specific reference to their relationships with each other, and the various effects of sub-caste and class differences on the personal and educational lives of students at the University of Shah Jahan. Here, I have highlighted the various tensions that exist within the Dalit caste (especially between creamy-layer and Quota Dalit students) and work to challenge the community from within.

The chapter presents the views and experiences of the students and non-students participating in this study (drawn from both creamy-layer and Quota Dalits), and contextualises the personal struggles they undergo as members of the heterogeneous Dalit community in an elite university setting. The complexities and tensions faced by these students at the University of Shah Jahan are, for the most part, the direct consequence of different sub-caste affiliations – class, language,

region, etc. – within the larger Dalit caste. This dilemma has impacted upon the Dalit community at large. As a result, one may wonder whether the creamy-layer Dalits have displaced other, less privileged Quota Dalits; and whether or not the Quota policy is being sensibly deployed. Are there flaws in the monitoring of the Quota scheme? Should Dalits in general be means-tested to ensure that access is better managed? Is the Quota policy still fit for purpose?

The Quota policy, originally devised to augment the access to universities of a dispossessed and marginalised group, continues to provide places in higher education for the Dalit. So a greater level of access and inclusion has been attained. But there are further obstacles in the way, even for those who are able to access elite universities like Shah Jahan. As the present study amply shows, this premier university is yet another arena in which the practice of caste and sub-caste division persists. While one might argue that the Quota System has benefited the Dalit community (especially creamy-layer Dalits from well-to-do families), the role of the policy today must be questioned. Why are Quota seats still provided for all Dalits, despite the considerable gap between poor and under-privileged working-class Dalits and creamy-layer individuals from professional middle-class families?

Chapter 6 highlighted the concerns surrounding the issue of Quota seats (especially regarding meritocracy) that were raised either directly or indirectly by some of the study's non-Dalit student respondents. Some of the non-Dalit students and Quota Dalits surveyed in this chapter implied – whether intentionally or inadvertently – that various individuals may have used their status as Dalit to gain entry into Shah Jahan despite benefiting from a well-to-do middle-class background. In the case of admission to highly desirable courses such as engineering or medicine, for instance, the entry grades required for a Quota place are viewed as 'mediocre' by non-Dalit students with higher grades. It is widely considered unacceptable for creamy-layer Dalit students to gain access to prestigious courses in spite of lower entry requirements, as this allegedly undermines the aspirations of high-achieving non-

Dalit students and thus arguably lowers the standards of the academic course (Singh and Malik, 2001; Rana, 2008).

As a result, the system for monitoring Quota seats is called into question. While the Quota System has certainly been implemented on behalf of both male and female Dalits, the monitoring process involved is inadequate. Moreover, although the policies may be empowering in theory, their administration is unequivocally not. For instance, the reservation process often perpetuates the exclusion of Dalit applicants rather than facilitating their access to higher education. This issue becomes particularly contentious if we take into account non-Dalits who do not come from financially well-off families, and may thus also require some form of government assistance resembling that of Quota seats and scholarships.

Furthermore, there are differences and distinctions to be noted within the caste system itself; caste is a complex, hierarchical system composed of minute differentiations. It is also important to note that the characterisation of all non-Dalits as advantaged compared to their Dalit counterparts may be flawed. Non-Dalits too are internally differentiated according to India's hierarchical caste framework, which includes Brahmins (those of a higher caste), Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras (lower caste ranks; see Chapter 1), and the various sub-castes within each group. As a result, members of different castes, sub-castes and classes perceive each other very differently, lending further nuance to this study of inter- and intra-caste differences with reference to the Quota System.

As discussed in this chapter, the caste identity of Dalit individuals is also differentiated by the sub-divisions within the 'Dalit' caste (D'Souza, 2009). Even though the Dalits can certainly be said to have benefited from the Quota policy and the seats in higher education (15%) allotted to them, internal rivalries deriving from caste, sub-caste and class differences (the latter relating in particular to profession and income category) make the administration and monitoring of the Quota System

additionally complex. At times, the elevated status of creamy-layer Dalits makes them disinclined to identify with other, less privileged members of their caste.

As explored in this chapter, the advantageous placement of creamy-layer Dalit students enables them to exercise a degree of social power, and in this way to perpetuate some form of discrimination. This issue has led to a growing divide between the creamy-layer (usually city-bred) Dalit and the Quota Dalit (rural/urban and less privileged), based on differences in caste prestige (according to sub-caste hierarchy) and class differences. As a result, Dalit individuals often find it difficult to adjust and/or to relate to others, at both a personal and a social level. In the university setting, this may perpetuate and indeed amplify the unfair treatment of under-privileged Dalit students, contributing to the exclusion of Quota Dalit. The complexities and tensions faced by Dalit students at the University of Shah Jahan are, for the most part, the direct consequence of the different sub-caste affiliations – as well as differences in class, language, region, etc. – within the larger Dalit caste. Even though Dalits have entered the portals of higher education, sub-caste differences reflecting the hierarchical make-up of the Dalit community continue to cause conflict, exacerbating the exclusionary behaviour of some (creamy-layer) Dalits towards their Quota Dalit colleagues.

According to a small number of the Dalit students interviewed for this study, some creamy-layer Dalits have exploited the Quota System to gain advantages in higher education, despite benefiting already from affluent economic and social backgrounds. If a Quota Dalit proves unable to meet the standards for higher learning, then the “Quota seats get taken by economically well-to-do and educationally able creamy-layer urban Dalit students” (Singh and Malik, 2001, p. 217). According to Kumar (2003), this situation has gradually lowered the aspirations of poorer Dalit students, who are forced unfairly to “compete with their [creamy-layer] counterparts to make use of the opportunities provided by the Quota

reservation policy” (p. 159). This development has widened the gap between creamy-layer (usually city-bred) and Quota (rural/urban and less privileged) Dalits.

Differences in caste and class prestige (according to the hierarchy of sub-castes) have only exacerbated the situation for the Dalit. Members of the creamy-layer class have begun to associate themselves with the non-Dalits, and to distance themselves from individuals of their own caste and community (D’Souza, 2009). Such an attitude considerably detracts from feelings of kinship with poorer Dalit individuals; and thus, over time, even the unity of the Dalit caste may break down. As this study shows, caste and class division and exclusion are maintained and indeed reinforced in the university environment. The experiences shared by Dalit students in interview reveal that the difficulties they encounter usually arise from the underlying causes of caste marginalisation. In short, inclusion and exclusion in the university setting reflect the complexities that exist within the Dalit community as a whole.

Despite the fact that Dalit students share a common caste identity, with ‘Dalitness’ seemingly uniting their community, this apparent homogeneity is undermined by other forms of diversity and prevalence of sub-caste differences. This complexity and heterogeneity makes the issue of social justice even more complicated for the Dalit. As beneficiaries of the constitutional Quota policy, both creamy-layer and Quota Dalit students access its distributive form of justice, which enables them to participate as students and faculty in the University of Shah Jahan. However, while the Quota policy thus appears to support the Dalit community/caste in accessing higher education, the underlying differences between different Dalit (the so-called creamy-layer and much poorer Quota Dalits) produce additional complexities (Rana, 2008; D’Souza, 2009).

Debates as to whether creamy-layer or Quota Dalit students are equally worthy recipients of the Quota seats have become increasingly evident in Indian society. Creamy-layer Dalits, for example, are often viewed by Quota Dalits as a privileged group who make use of their caste identity to access advantages at the price of their poorer peers. Both creamy-layer Dalits and Quota Dalits are legally able to benefit from Quota seats, according to the Indian Constitution. The argument however centres round the issue of 'need' rather than legal rights; should quota places be reserved for wealthy Dalit who may be well placed to access a place at Shah Jahan (and other equally high-status universities) or should the places only be reserved for the poorer sections of the Dalit community?

Creamy-layer Dalits have, to a certain degree, exploited the Quota System to acquire advantages in higher education. They have sometimes even been able to 'pass' as non-Dalits. In this way, some members of the Dalit caste, many of whom belong to the creamy layer, have been able to disassociate themselves from other, less advantaged Dalit. In this way, according to D'Souza (2009) a more insidious form of exclusion within inclusion is produced. In turn, these sorts of practices may reduce feelings of kinship between different fractions of the Dalit caste; and thus, over time, the unity of the caste has been weakened (Rana, 2008). On the other hand, it is evident that most Dalit students – both creamy-layer and Quota Dalit – still have to contend with forms of marginalisation and exclusionary treatment from non-Dalits in the university environment (in classrooms, canteens, etc.).

What this chapter has described is the way in which there are tensions between different dimensions of social justice. While all Dalit are susceptible to exclusions in relation to recognition and respect – they can all be sidelined and regarded as of less worth by members of higher castes – nevertheless, some are better placed to avoid this form of oppression, for example, through 'passing'. While all Dalit are eligible for a quota place, a form of distributive justice, if this process does not take account of economic differences, then the distribution might not seem that

socially just. Perhaps what these tensions reveal is that realising social justice in practice is a complex process that is only ever partially achieved.

In summary, it appears that – despite the success of the Quota System in enabling an increasing number of Dalits to enter the portals of higher education – the personal and social conflicts encountered by Dalit students reflect the growing differences within the Dalit community (similar to those in non-Dalit communities) that pose a significant challenge to the unity of the Dalit caste itself – and shape students’ experiences in one elite university in India.

Chapter 9

Summary and Conclusions

9. Introduction

This chapter offers a synopsis of the study's larger concerns, synthesising the major findings of the investigation to comment on the implications of the Quota policy (designed originally to increase Dalit access to higher education), and the experiences of postgraduate Dalit students and faculty members in the elite University of Shah Jahan. My discussion will consider the aims and significance of the research in light of the experiences of the Dalits (both student and faculty) who participated in this study. I will then consider the contribution made by this small-scale qualitative study, in terms of empirical evidence, to existing research on the injustices faced by postgraduate Dalit students and faculty members. I will also identify new and significant issues arising from the research which should be taken into account by educators, university administrators and higher education policy makers seeking to further the development of Dalit students in the future. I will also highlight the limitations of the present research study. Finally, I will suggest some additional areas which I believe require further attention from researchers.

9.1 Summary/Restatement of Aims

This study has sought to contribute to the understanding of Dalit experiences in higher education through a case study conducted in one elite learning institution in India (the University of Shah Jahan) in light of the Quota schemes designed to promote the Dalit community's access to higher education. The aim of this

investigation was to illustrate and assess some of the implications of the Quota System for the access and recruitment of Dalit students and faculty to higher education, and their experiences within a university setting. More specifically, the research sought to establish whether or not Dalit students and faculty encounter caste-based discrimination at the University of Shah Jahan. The experiences of the participants – both students and faculty members – were collected by means of a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews, and were then analysed through open coding. Certain key themes emerged from this process, with particular regard to discrimination practised against the Dalits.

In the course of my research, I was able to achieve my stated objectives. The study highlights the problems faced by members of the Dalit caste through critical analysis of their experiences in an elite university. It examines contemporary evidence of the experiences of Dalit faculty members and students, and of the internal schisms formed within the caste. The research objectives relating to the current situation of the Dalit respondents addressed the following three areas in turn: first, the nature of Dalits' experiences in an elite higher educational system; second, certain injustices that continue to thrive in institutions that support educational achievement; and finally, whether or not India's formal commitment to equal opportunities has been realised in the Indian higher educational system. My research took a more specific focus using the questions detailed in Chapter 4 (Methodology), which sought to explore further the hypotheses posed at the beginning of this study. It is now possible to affirm that caste discrimination does exist in elite universities, practised both against and between Dalit minorities, and that this raises questions about the constitutionally established Quota (reservation) policy designed to promote Dalit access to, and participation in, higher education.

9.2 Contributions

In this section, I will highlight the contribution that my study has made to existing research through analysis of Dalits' experiences at the University of Shah Jahan. The findings of the research will be considered, and the overall significance of this investigation to the current context will be discussed.

9.2.1 Research Findings

This section revisits the research questions that frame this study in order to remind the reader of the reasons why the study was undertaken (see Chapter 4 – Methodology). It explores the main findings of the thesis and assesses its contribution to existing knowledge.

In summary, my study investigates the Quota (reservation) policy designed by the Indian government to increase Dalits' access to and participation in higher education. It highlights the various complexities and inequalities of life within the premier university setting, as evidenced and experienced by Dalit students and faculty. The data collected forms a basis for understanding the different levels, modes and dynamics of Dalits' lives within higher education, as well as the tensions that result from caste-related exclusionary practices in one elite university setting. This is a novel finding, not least because scholars have usually focused on the religious aspects of caste that affect Dalits in a few northern and southern regions of India, looking in particular at rural and urban educational institutions. By contrast, my study has investigated the experiences of Dalit students and faculty in an elite university setting located in a large city.

As shown in the literature review undertaken in Chapters 2 and 3, research studies to date have tended to prioritise Dalit education in a few northern (U.P., Bihar, Punjab, etc.) and southern (Karnataka, Tamil, etc.) regions of India. Most of this work focuses on Dalits in rural, semi-urban and small urban educational institutions. Although extensive research has been carried out into the Dalit caste, researchers have paid little attention to Dalit postgraduate students in elite universities located in large metropolitan areas. Moreover, studies have rarely considered the experiences of Dalit faculty members, and the growing differences between creamy-layer Dalits and Dalits on Quota scholarships. Although the existing literature has shed light on the minimal recruitment of Dalit faculty members into educational institutions (see Chapters 3 and 5), almost no studies have considered the personal experiences of Dalit faculty members discriminated against primarily by non-Dalits (as evidenced in Chapter 5), both while teaching and when interacting with the administration/management of premier universities. Similarly, researchers have rarely grappled with the issue of Dalit female faculty members and the caste, class and gender-based prejudice they face. The Dalit females in my sample group – both students and faculty – were all, to a greater or lesser extent, engaged in a struggle with Dalit and non-Dalit individuals (both male and female) in the university environment.

9.2.2 Significance of Findings

In terms of its contribution to research, this study provides empirical evidence of caste-based prejudice in the educational lives of current postgraduate Dalit students and faculty in an elite university setting in India. It also offers an empirical account of Dalits' experiences of the Quota policy: the growing tensions between non-Dalits and Dalits, as well as those between 'creamy-layer' and 'Quota' Dalits. As previously mentioned, scholars have tended thus far to discuss various forms of

discriminatory behaviour in small colleges within the northern and southern regions of India. The interviews carried out in this study at the University of Shah Jahan, as discussed in Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8, elicited data that substantiate the research hypotheses. This research study has not relied solely on secondary evidence. As an explorative study, the research draws upon data obtained through interviews with Dalit students, faculty members and political administrators (namely the Vice-Chairman of the State Minorities Commission and one senior higher education policy maker).

As the thesis shows, most of the Dalit under study are successful, urban individuals. They all have a first degree. They are all at a university of Ivy League status. The question might arise, therefore: why are the experiences of these comparatively privileged individuals worth worrying about? Is it really necessary to research Dalit experiences in elite institutions?

To reiterate, first, the Dalit are one of the largest minority communities in India, consisting of around 200 million people. No other caste community in India has suffered the same level of discrimination as that meted out to the Dalits over centuries of unequal treatment. It is vital, therefore, to persist in raising awareness of the situation faced by the Dalits, particularly as they occupy such a significant proportion of the Indian population. As a minority community, in terms of power if not size, they are the most oppressed, and are subject to various social injustices, structural inequalities and exclusionary patterns embedded within Indian society, particularly in the educational context. Although some Dalit males and females have entered the portals of higher education via seats reserved by the Quota policy – with the individuals in the present study gaining access to a well known elite university, distinguished for its rich learning environment – their situation is both more complicated and more troubling than appearances suggest. For instance, the complex differences between the experiences of Quota and creamy-layer Dalit in

relation to non-Dalit students, faculty, and university administration require further exploration and analysis.

Second, as discussed in Chapters 5 to 8, all of the Dalit involved in this study have been subject to one form of discrimination or another, regardless of whether they are Quota Dalits (that is, receiving Quota scholarships), or creamy-layer Dalits. Their Dalit identity, or ‘Dalitness’, compartmentalises them within a single caste category, subjecting them alike to exclusionary behavioural patterns – even within an elite university famed for embracing equality and advocating education for all. Little is known about the experiences of Dalit, whether Quota or creamy-layer, studying and working within elite higher education in large cities. As a result, therefore, it has been well worth exploring and shedding light on their experiences within a high-status university in a metropolitan setting – particularly one that is known for espousing egalitarian principles, and which might, therefore, have been expected to be more ‘advanced’ and inclusive in its approach to social diversity.

Third, this exploratory research study addresses not only the lived and grounded experiences of male Dalit students, but the acute challenges faced in higher education by female Dalit students, as well as Dalit faculty members (both male and female). Together, these four groups form an integral part of the learning environment within universities. The present study sheds light, therefore, on the complexity of Dalit students’ and faculty members’ experiences in elite higher education, while suggesting areas in which further research might be undertaken. For instance, future studies would benefit from comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the experiences of Dalit faculty and Dalit females (both faculty members and students), as well as from comparing the treatment of Quota and creamy-layer Dalits in higher education.

These findings will augment our understanding of the Dalit situation in elite university settings in India. The present research offers a foundation for future

investigation into the experiences of Dalit faculty and students (especially females), and the rising tensions between creamy-layer and Quota Dalits in other elite higher educational institutions. The findings presented here add significantly to our understanding of the predicament of the Dalit community within India today (with particular reference to the Quota policy), and of the experiences of Dalits in city-based premier universities. In sum, the present study both confirms previous findings and contributes additional evidence for the influence of caste-based prejudice on the experiences of Dalits in elite metropolitan universities, with specific reference to the University of Shah Jahan.

It is important to note that these findings cannot necessarily be extrapolated to other well known institutions. Nonetheless, this study offers additional motivation for a thorough exploration of the Quota System policy initiatives and the caste bias issues that may adversely affect Dalits in other premier universities in India. Social exclusion will continue to cause suffering within the Dalit community as long as caste prejudice remains dominant in the sphere of higher education. This kind of exclusion takes many forms at the elite University of Shah Jahan, and it seems likely that the same is true of elite universities in other parts of India.

9.3 Methodology

This section will reflect briefly on the analytical approach utilised in the study, and discuss the approaches used to question the participants involved. In this way, I will address factors which may have affected the respondents' views and perspectives on certain issues in their educational lives.

9.3.1 Reflection on Methods

In the course of this research, I remained aware that both Dalit and non-Dalit participants may at some level have shared information selectively. When designing the questions and carrying out the interviews, therefore, it was necessary to think about questions similar to those posed by Davies (1999, p. 13), which are as follows: “How do you get people to elaborate on what they say? How can you trust what people are telling you?”

Care was taken from the outset in framing the questions asked of both Dalit and non-Dalit participants. I sought to adjust the questions depending on the various dynamics involved in cross-cultural interactions. It seemed important to take into consideration certain characteristics of the interviewees which might affect their views and perceptions of the situations they encounter in their university lives. Careful groundwork was undertaken to ensure that intervention was culturally sensitive to both gender and caste (i.e. to both Dalit and non-Dalit males and females, whether students or faculty members). Extensive prior reading on caste, culture and gender in India broadened my awareness and understanding of the interviewees’ current situation, both as individuals and as part of a community within Indian society. More generally, my familiarity with Indian culture, and fluency in both its main language (Hindi) and the relevant regional language (Malayali), enabled me to direct the interviewing process with precision and confidence.

It is important also to consider the question of trust, which may have affected the interviewees’ openness about their views and experiences. Some of the Dalit respondents were cautious about sharing information during the interview sessions. For example, faculty members were aware of their position as Dalit academics in an elite institution, and were thus, for the most part, very careful in the comments they

made about academic administration and management. As educators, they were in control of how they framed their answers to my questions. At certain points, it was evident that they were consciously refraining from answering certain questions; regarding non-Dalit academics, for example, and departmental management. Certain precautions were necessary on their part if they were to involve themselves with this research; namely, refraining from answering questions that appeared sensitive, especially in relation to faculty management.

The same issue was evident in the responses made by the Dalit student interviewees. Of the many respondents who seemed wary about sharing information, one participant – a male student, and the leader of the university's Dalit student organisation – was particularly cautious, especially when discussing political and social aspects of university life. Although he felt able to offer some information about the social situation of the Dalits in the University of Shah Jahan, he was reluctant to be candid for personal reasons, with his own welfare as a creamy-layer Dalit in mind. This was unsurprising, however, given his role as a Dalit student leader.

In addition, it is possible that my position as both a researcher and an outsider to the Dalit community may have limited the research process. Personal inhibitions, over-generalisations, and my inevitably partial understanding of Dalits' experiences, perceptions and emotional responses may have limited the information I received. Acknowledging me as a stranger (and not part of their caste or community), the Dalit may have been more reluctant to be forthcoming, whether about their real-life situations at the University of Shah Jahan, or about Indian society at large.

9.4 Implications of the Research Study

In this section I will discuss the implications of my study, and identify issues that might inform further research in this area.

9.4.1 Possible Implications

The findings of this study amply attest to the value of research on the experiences of Dalits in premier institutes of learning, as a means of expanding our broader understanding of the Dalit community. The demand for education has grown considerably among Dalits over recent decades. Yet although government bureaucrats and Dalit leaders alike have promised to make provision for setting up new universities and improving Quota policies, Jogdand (2007) argues that they have done so primarily to further their own social, political and economic interests. Despite these policies, intolerance and resentment persist. Such forms of oppression cannot be eradicated by laws alone. The majority of Dalit individuals in India continue to receive unequal treatment due to their caste affiliation – even in an elite setting where one might expect egalitarian principles to predominate. The Quota System alone cannot resolve the problem of caste discrimination.

On the other hand, however, the Quota policy has been defended for its role in offering some compensation for the adversity suffered by the Dalits throughout India's history. A hierarchical government has existed in India for many decades, and as such, inequalities continue to be politically manifested. A true challenge for the Indian government would be to raise awareness of the Dalits' oppressed state, and implement more stringent laws to ensure that Dalits are treated on a parity with non-Dalits, rather than neglecting their needs and favouring non-Dalit progress. Such a substantial change may not be considered a pragmatic or even workable

solution. Yet compared to an earlier stage in India's development, today's economic progress and ever-increasing globalisation have created a far more suitable environment for the establishment of new, internationally recognised laws that can be used to eliminate discrimination and boost Dalit participation within India's educational system and society at large.

With the increasing privatisation of universities and colleges, higher education in India runs the risk of catering only to the economically prosperous, and denying its services to under-privileged communities such as the Dalit (Chalam, 2007). There has been little discernible movement to date towards equalisation in terms of education; Dalits continue to remain undervalued in the sphere of higher education. Non-Dalit attacks on the Quota System regarding issues of merit and new policies are further undermining the Quota policy in the educational sector (Singh and Malik, 2001; Jogdand, 2007).

One implication of these findings is that we must call the effectiveness of the Quota System in promoting the interests of the Dalit community into question, especially in light of the multi-faceted tensions that exist between non-Dalit and Dalit students, and between 'creamy-layer' and 'Quota' Dalit students. Complex divisions have arisen which perpetuate caste segregation and make individuals reluctant to improve intercultural understanding between Dalit and non-Dalit communities (Kapoor, 2004). For example, some middle-class non-Dalits fear that their capacity to access higher education will be reduced as a consequence of the Quota policy, and have consistently demanded what they call a more 'meritocratic' system. Influential non-Dalit individuals continue to oppose the Quota System on the basis of merit, arguing that the policy works to exclude 'able' (high-caste) students (Chalam, 2007; Amman, 2008). Moreover, the identity of the Dalit people is both complex and varied; of which one consequence is the creamy layer/Quota divide. Their social group is considerably

differentiated: between urban and rural, for example, and educated and non-educated; more and less rich; male and female.

It appears, therefore, that the findings of this study have several additional implications for future practice. They suggest further avenues for analysis of the Quota policy, especially concerning the internal prejudices that exist between creamy-layer and Quota Dalit students in university education. Policy makers should look with some urgency into the matter of which Dalits benefit from the Quota System, and which do not.

This research study has argued that, despite the existence of the Quota System for the official purpose of increasing Dalit access to universities, the policy's implementation in higher education (including the University of Shah Jahan) has been neglected. Those involved in administration and management continue to disregard the importance of the policy for the future of Dalits in higher education. Although critics (including myself) may argue that Quota seats should also be made available in India for poor non-Dalits and other minorities (especially religious minorities like Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Jains, etc.), the evidence obtained in this research study calls for more attention to be paid to the atrocities and injustices that have been inflicted upon Dalit students and faculty on social and religious grounds for centuries. Even today, their caste identity as 'Dalit' marks them out for discrimination.

As regards the development of the Dalit community, this study recommends that more university places be made available to Quota Dalits via means tests to identify those who come from financially challenged backgrounds, as well as rural Dalits who have applied to study at city universities. The following strategic adjustments should be made to the Quota System: first, its primary objective should be redirected to address the social and economic vulnerability of rural Quota Dalits, and to implement measures to protect their educational welfare and fulfil their developmental needs. Second, unless the Indian government develops

suitable methods for monitoring the allocation of Quota seats, it will never be possible to achieve equal Quota allocation for Dalit students. This will lead to more schisms within the Dalit community, particularly between creamy-layer and Quota Dalits.

It is important to bear in mind, however, that, in addition to its impact on the Dalits, the issue of Quota reservations raises several other concerns that may require close attention. From the perspective of distributive justice, for example, it might be necessary to increase Quota reservations for other, non-Dalit castes, in order to facilitate access to higher education for deserving individuals from poor and under-privileged backgrounds. It could be argued that, in order to distribute merit-based rewards (such as recruitment into higher education), the Indian government should seek to extend the Quota System to assist disadvantaged non-Dalit persons, and to widen their participation in the elite university setting. However, this recommendation could have far more complex repercussions. Rather like the well-to-do (creamy-layer) Dalits who nonetheless benefit from the Quota reservations (see Chapter 8), the chances are that some privileged non-Dalits might abuse or take advantage of an expanded Quota policy. As a result, the entire Quota System for access to higher education would be undermined.

This said, however, the policy implications of the current research study certainly include the need to build a broad understanding of the caste sensitivity of higher education, with particular attention to the challenges faced by the Dalit community. One approach to foregrounding and tackling this issue would be to extend this study's in-depth analysis to other elite universities and well known private technical institutes in India. In other words, more research is required to determine how best to adjust the Quota policy such that adequate provision is made for Dalits to access and participate in higher education across India.

9.4.2 Issues to Consider

The issue of caste bias remains pervasive within the higher education sector of Indian society, with Dalits more often judged by their traditionally ascribed caste status than by their academic achievements. Instead, of course, they seek to be judged on their academic potential, and ask that other castes acknowledge their need for development and support. More protective legislation should be implemented to improve Dalits' social mobility, especially in light of the atrocities they have faced throughout India's history. However, conflicts between fundamental constitutional rights and the principles of state policy have characterised numerous parliamentary debates and individual declarations (Nirula, 2005). Programmes aiming to empower the Dalit community and rectify the social, economic and political difficulties experienced by most Dalits have met with little response from various governments (Jogdand, 2007). Unfortunately, those representing the Dalits in government have no real authority to take action against more powerful government departments controlled by higher-caste Hindus. Recommendations that the government become more willing and/or prepared to confront this issue are often met with disinterest or outright distrust (Das, 2000).

Even though some Dalits have successfully used the Quota System to gain access to higher education, it seems, in general, that the position of the large Dalit community remains unstable, and its hope for an improved future through the Quota scheme doubtful. On another front, the increasing prominence of sub-caste differences calls for more research into the treatment of sub-castes within the Dalit community. Although the treatment of Dalits by non-Dalits in various spheres – social, economic, political, and educational – is undoubtedly worthy of further scrutiny, attention to the conflict between various Dalit sub-castes (such as creamy-layer and Quota Dalits) will offer a more representative picture of the scale and patterns of caste discrimination, as well as, and more importantly, the gender issues that may also exist between the Dalits.

9.5 Limitations of the Current Study

The focus of this research study was a single Ivy League-standard university (Shah Jahan), and the purpose of the research was to gain insight into the impact of the Quota policy on the experiences of Dalit students and faculty members (both male and female) in an elite university environment. In the course of the research, I also endeavoured to investigate the extent to which the Quota System has assisted the Dalit community's higher educational goals, as well as the ways in which the policy and its effects have been experienced by the Dalits (both students and faculty members). Finally, I discussed the impact of caste prejudice on Dalit access and recruitment to higher education, along with their progression within this learning environment.

Overall, this is a small study, and my findings need to be advanced both with caution and with the recognition that the participants may not necessarily be representative of all Dalits who study and work at Shah Jahan. It could be argued that those Dalits who agreed to take part in this study may have been highly motivated to participate by their extreme experiences within the university setting. Moreover, the University of Shah Jahan, comprising more than 100 colleges and running diverse courses, with a large faculty body, has a student population that runs into several thousands. There are no statistics available to denote how many of the staff and students are Dalit; thus, my small-scale exploratory study based on in-depth interviews with a small number of participants (44 students and 11 faculty members, both Dalit and non-Dalit) may not be representative of the many other Dalit students spread across other premier institutes of higher learning in India.

As a result, a number of caveats should be noted regarding the findings of the present study. It could be argued, for example, that the research was inhibited by the use of a small sample of respondents. However, it is important to bear in mind that this was an exploratory study examining the position of Dalits within an elite

university setting. Effort was made to obtain a representative sample of postgraduate Dalits from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and educational departments, in order to gain a balanced portrait of their real-life experiences in an elite academic institution of higher studies. The Dalit professors interviewed were also drawn from a range of academic departments, and were asked to provide both their informed intellectual opinions on the challenges posed by caste discrimination in academia, and details of their personal experiences of this issue. The respondents' testimonies were used in this study to examine the reality of caste discrimination, which continues to impede the social and economic progress of the Dalit community on a large scale. The respondents included both students and educators in higher education (all with pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality), thus gaining a full range of Dalit experiences and roles in a university setting. Moreover, the research includes personal interviews with at least one Dalit student of each of the arts, science and professional (medicine, engineering, management) departments in the University of Shah Jahan.

The research analysis was limited in several ways. Whilst the study included both male and female Dalit students and faculty members as respondents, in order to gain a holistic overview of the many and varied issues they encounter, the majority of the respondents (36 - particularly students and faculty) were male, with only 19 (students and faculty) female interviewees. The first limitation of the study, therefore, concerns its gender balance; that is, the small number of Dalit females as compared to Dalit males. Although women are an equally important component of the Dalit community, it was generally more difficult to gain access to Dalit females. First, there were fewer Dalit females than Dalit males at the University of Shah Jahan at the time of the study. Second, there are greater cultural limitations within Indian society for a male interviewing a female, as opposed to a male interviewee. Third, and most importantly, the particular situation of Dalit females and the prejudices they face as a result of the complex interaction of gender, caste and class would require considerable additional investigation. In short, in Indian society,

where patriarchy and hierarchy are endemic within cultural tradition and belief, the challenges faced by Dalit females as compared to males would call for a separate analysis.

The second limitation is that the nature of the experiences described by the interviewees in this study is personal and therefore subjective (Hammersley, 2008). The Dalit participants in particular (especially creamy-layer males) tended to exercise a degree of caution in their responses, which has limited the current analysis. For example, two creamy-layer Dalit male respondents (Rajesh and Ashok) often minimised, or ignored invitations to elaborate on, the difficulties created by the Quota policy. I would suggest that they refused to engage further on this issue because they did not want to discuss the resentment held against them – as beneficiaries of the Quota policy despite being socially and economically privileged – by Quota Dalit students.

Third, as previously mentioned, the faculty members approached the interviews with even greater caution and diplomacy, given the sensitivity of this issue. They were not always able to elaborate openly as to the extent of caste bias, or even to share the many complex caste-related tensions ongoing within their departments or classrooms. Moreover, this study addresses issues faced by urban Dalit in the main; it does not profess to uncover or engage fully with the situation of rural Dalit communities, most of whose members do not, in any case, attend elite universities. A further limitation of this study is that the number of Dalit students involved was relatively small.

My own lack of experience of the Dalit situation constituted another limitation. Although I was aware of the community's "reel life" – from sources such as independent documentaries, news, and live TV coverage, as well as newspapers and magazines – I had no experience of their "real-life" situation in terms of personal

interaction and the complexities of their day-to-day experiences within the higher educational environment.

As noted above, a larger number of respondents could have provided scope for further data analysis, especially in relation to Dalit females. However, I recorded my observations as accurately as possible. I translated and transcribed the interview tapes in full and did not take short-cuts by coding only data that fitted the emerging themes. Many of my recommendations for future study (addressed in the following section) derive from my assessment of the limitations of this thesis.

9.6 Recommendations for Further Research on Dalits in Higher Education

This study foregrounds the need for further investigation of the Dalits' situation and role(s) within higher education. I recommend that further in-depth analysis be carried out in three specific areas, as highlighted below:

- 1) The implications of the Quota System for Dalit faculty members, with specific attention to the experiences of Dalit female faculty members in light of both caste and gender differentiation within higher education in India.
- 2) The relationship between creamy-layer and Quota (non-creamy-layer) Dalit in other elite university settings. To this end, comprehensive comparative analysis will be required in order to collate the experiences of individuals who belong to the same social group (Dalit) but come from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds across various states in India.
- 3) The experiences of high-caste non-Dalit undergraduates and graduates (especially Brahmins, those of the highest caste) in comparison with privileged creamy-layer Dalit students in the university setting, with particular reference to the

Quota policies for access to premier higher education institutions. To allow the debate about the Quota System policy to move forward, more data may be required on the experiences of creamy-layer Dalit and high-caste (Brahmin) non-Dalit, especially regarding the issue of ‘merit’ within higher education.

More broadly, research is also needed to identify appropriate adjustments to the Quota reservation policies. This study has offered an analysis of the diverse empirical realities of Dalits’ lives and experiences, and the struggle to secure social justice within Indian society. However, the government’s overall commitment to the inclusion of the Dalit caste/community within education requires significant advancement. The formal system of “protective legislation for the Quota policies has not penetrated the caste-ceiling in any real sense”, and “has not proved to be an equalizing mechanism” (Narula, 2008, p. 54). Although constitutional legislation has had some positive effects for the Dalit community (as evidenced by the emergence of creamy-layer Dalits), the social and economic progress they have made has done little to reduce caste bias (Narula, 2008). Such bias is deep-rooted, and remains alive and well within Indian society. As a result, Dalit students in elite institutions such as the University of Shah Jahan continue to face rejection, discrimination and exclusion. On a more optimistic front, however, the results of the Quota System policy have in certain respects been remarkable, helping some Dalits to access far greater life opportunities.

The study concludes that the measures taken to implement, administer and monitor the Quota (reservation) policy have been inadequate in terms of equalising opportunities for Dalits against the overwhelming hierarchical structure of Indian society, whose cultural beliefs and traditions are hostile to Dalit progress. The debate surrounding the Quota policy has failed to ask the crucial question of who stands to profit from systematic social exclusion. In any case, the Quota policy alone is an unsatisfactory remedy for caste bias in Indian society. This study has examined the ways in which the constitutional provision of Quota seats for the

Dalits is overshadowed by caste-affiliated prejudices practised against them. Unsurprisingly, its conclusions regarding the Quota scheme have foregrounded the problems associated with Quota privileges (especially in view of the research respondents' experiences), and the inadequacy of the procedures implemented to monitor the Quota policy and increase its accountability and transparency in recruiting Dalit individuals to India's universities. All of these deficiencies have denied the Dalit population equal opportunities in the realm of higher education.

The findings of this study suggest that future research might profitably consider the situation of Dalits in other premier institutions – also known for their potential for promoting and embracing inclusion, progress, non-discriminatory behaviour, and an egalitarian attitude towards diverse peoples and communities in India's large cities. Exploring how discrimination against the Dalit community works in such institutions could provide a more rounded perspective on the Dalits' current situation in higher education institutions, and their chances of achieving success given the stigma that comes with their caste affiliation. Further research is therefore recommended in order to pinpoint the complexities of caste bias in relation to sub-caste, identity, gender, class, and so on, as well as the challenges faced by policies that seek to widen participation. The dichotomy between Quota reservations and the principle of merit-based admissions is an important example.

9.6.1 Further research on the complex and differentiated experiences of Dalits

Due to the heterogeneity of the Dalit caste, and the fact that the Dalit live across different states and regions of India, every Dalit individual undergoes very different experiences. India is a large, diverse country, in which there is a clear urban/rural divide. Dalits living in urban areas usually encounter less discrimination from non-Dalits than their counterparts in rural areas, where the idea of caste separation continues to thrive under Hindu caste doctrines (Thorat, 2009). Rural Dalits

sometimes fall victim to overt discrimination in their educational and working lives (D'Souza, 2008), whereas Dalits dwelling in large cities may encounter a more covert form of discrimination (Chalam, 2007). Further exploration of Dalits' experiences in different regions and settings in India could shed more light on the various forms of caste bias they continue to face, whether in higher learning or employment (i.e., after graduating with a university degree).

Some city-dwelling Dalits fare much better than the rural Dalits, benefiting from greater access to good education, and more privileged social and economic lives (Rana, 2008). As I have argued in my thesis, creamy-layer Dalits who hail from affluent homes, and who are born and bred in large cities, are socially, educationally and economically distinct from their much poorer and less privileged Dalit counterparts in small rural areas, even those who migrate to large cities. Given this socio-economic disparity, one would consider it either vital for the Indian government to revisit the Quota policy and investigate on who (whether creamy layer or Quota Dalits) benefits most from the Quota seats reserved for them in their access and participation to higher education, or to view it more critically, may just find it impossible to manage the Quota policy situation.

In terms of the complex and differentiated experiences of Dalits across different parts of India, the unjust treatments caused by sub-caste division and disunity within the Dalit community need some recognition (Rana, 2008; see Chapter 8). In such cases, one witnesses the sheer complexity of the problems that arise within the Dalit caste, as a result of sub-caste and caste differences (D'Souza, 2008). Here, social injustice seems to emanate from within the Dalit community itself. For example, Dalit females are generally treated differently from Dalit men in the context of both family and society; in the latter case, this is also contingent on class and sub-caste hierarchies within the Dalit caste. It has already been noted that Dalit men receive privileged treatment from their families, as compared to Dalit women who are less likely to be treated equally. This inequality, along with the additional

complexities of family/patriarchal/caste dynamics, raises questions about the social injustices perpetrated against Dalit women by their family members, as compared to Dalit men. However, it must be stated that gendered discrimination is a feature of all the castes and sub-caste groupings in Indian society.

Another fruitful avenue for research would involve comparison of creamy-layer and Quota Dalit to ascertain how much each group benefits from the provision of Quota seats in higher education (see Chapter 8). In terms of social equity, it is also vital to investigate the level of social and political recognition afforded by non-Dalits to poor rural Dalits as compared to the socially and economically privileged creamy-layer Dalits. How much impact do social, economic, cultural and regional differences have on the unity of the Dalit community, particularly with regard to sub-caste differences? What has the Indian government done to address the heterogeneity of the Dalit caste and the many complexities that are present within Dalit communities across the Indian sub-continent? Not unlike the caste bias expressed by non-Dalits against Dalits, there are clear divisions between Dalit of different sub-castes, social classes, languages, religions and regions, and between those who are more or less privileged in economic and political terms (respectively, the creamy-layer and Quota Dalit). More studies of Dalit complexity and internal stratification would prove useful to the field, not least to expose the myriad social injustices ongoing within the Dalit caste, which could then be considered with the aim of finding solutions.

9.6.2 Large-scale and comparative studies of the social exclusion of the Dalit community in different states and contexts in India

One shortcoming that has been evident in my consideration of the extant literature on the Dalit of India is that while there are studies based in some of the rural regions, there is a gap in what is known about the eastern, western and southern

regions, and most existing studies address the Dalit in northern India (see Chapter 3). Yet the exclusion of the Dalits remains widespread across the country, making the following tasks crucial:

- There is a need for more large-scale studies of caste bias (whether social, economic, educational, cultural or political) practised against Dalits in different states across India. It may be the case, for example, that some Dalits in Kerala are more socially, educationally and economically better placed to be recipients of government privileges than the Dalits in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Haryana, or other north-eastern regions of India where the Dalit (especially children) are less likely to be literate and continue to suffer violence and exclusion (Jogdand, 2007).
- There is a significant need to collect and monitor statistics on the current state of Dalit development in schools, colleges, universities and places of employment; this topic has yet to be addressed by researchers or government policy-makers.
- There is a need for large-scale and comparative in-depth investigation of the social inclusion and exclusion of Dalits in the field of higher education. This will help to contextualise the seriousness and persistence of the discrimination they face in India today.
- More research is needed to collect statistics on Dalits' access to and participation in higher education, including comparisons to determine whether creamy-layer or Quota Dalits benefit more from the Quota policy.
- Finally, there is a powerful need to conduct comparative studies of Dalit females (creamy-layer and Quota) in rural and urban educational institutions. This research will make a valuable contribution to the research domain.

All of these suggestions for further research on Dalits' experiences in different regions of India, as well as studies of their migration to larger cities to attain better

social, economic and educational lives, will provide a fuller, deeper and more nuanced understanding of the challenges that remain for members of the Dalit caste.

Moreover, additional in-depth analysis of the situation of non-Dalits (especially high-caste Brahmins), particularly with reference to the Quota policy's aim of promoting Dalits' access to higher education, could offer clearer insight into the relationship between Dalit and non-Dalit sectors of society in higher education (Thorat, 2009). However, it must be acknowledged that such solutions are viable only through political involvement on behalf of Dalit upliftment by means of strategies for inclusion. Such measures will be considered closely in the subsequent section.

9.7 Need for Political Involvement for Dalit Upliftment

The findings of this study indicate that constitutional provisions (i.e. the Quota System) and legislative measures (i.e. the Quota allocation of university places) have been successful in helping a small number of Dalits to gain access to higher education over time. The findings also suggest, however, that improvement is needed in the execution of current policies relating to the allocation of Quota System benefits. These should be more consistently integrated with other policies, as in Western nations which have applied and executed legislative laws to protect ethnic minorities. Several European and Asian countries follow some kind of affirmative action for the disadvantaged and deprived groups under their jurisdiction (Altshiller, 1991; Thorat and Negi, 2005).

The major problem with India's reservations policy is that there is no institutional mechanism – such as, for example, the USA's Equal Opportunities Commission – to support and monitor it (Thorat and Negi, 2005). Although the government implemented the Quota System for the support and development of the Dalit

community almost sixty years ago, this has not brought about much change for the lower castes, who are still significantly under-represented in the realm of higher education and elsewhere (Puri, 2004). For example, Dalit from rural areas have not moved up the success ladder; instead, they continue to suffer violence if they cross social/caste boundaries, even accidentally (Shyamlal, 2006).

Even though a small proportion of Dalit individuals today have somewhat better access to schooling and higher education in metropolitan areas (cities and towns), those in rural areas (which include most states of India) do not (Chalam, 2007). City-born Dalits have been better able to secure the privilege of education. In turn, those Dalit who benefit from educational access are usually able to climb the employment ladder, and now enjoy the social status and comfort associated with city life. Metropolitan areas are more conducive to a general environment of social change, as they allow quicker enquiry from political parties and the general press. Dalit in city areas (such as Mumbai, New Delhi, Kolkata, Bangalore, Chennai, Pune and Chandigarh, among others), are better placed to organise their communities to fight against socio-religious injustices, atrocities, caste-based discrimination and economic exploitation – and consequently benefit from enhanced confidence and self-respect (Thorat, 2009). Despite the fact that university education has thus far done little to erase the effects of prejudice for the Dalit people, its potential to raise awareness of the Dalit situation through political involvement, and to mobilise vigorous empowerment programmes in university settings, could set a stage for the further development of this caste (Sheth, 1997; Biswas, 2001; Hooda, 2001).

9.7.1 Prospective Strategies for Dalit in India

Many educated Dalit in the large cities of Western India have been vociferous in expressing their demands for equal rights and access to various social and political

spheres of Indian society. Political parties such as Bhim Sena, Dalit Sena, the Dalit Sahitya Movement (DSM) and the Bhartiya Republican Party (BRP) all seek to represent Dalit social rights politically. Political and social organisations like the “Dalit Panther, the Dalit Liberation Army, the Republican Youth and the Dalit Sangharsh Samiti” (Michael, 2007, p. 35), along with Dalit theatre, art, literature and (among Christians) theology communities, are working as pressure groups for the Dalit people (Burra, 1996).

On a political level, moreover, the influential secular political party Janata Dal acknowledges the right of every individual not only to basic education, but to higher education too. The party seeks ultimately to attain widespread literacy in India. Meanwhile, other governmental educational bodies like the Kothari Commission (originally incepted in 1964-1966) have expressed their hope that investment in higher education will increase (Sharma and Sharma, 2004). According to Michael (2007), approximately 50% of the government’s educational funds will be allocated for the development of Dalit at all levels. It is likely that half of all the resources allocated for Dalit education will be used to support and promote girls’ and women’s education. Crucially, however, the proper implementation and outcome of these plans remains to be seen (Kumar, 2004; Thorat, 2008).

9.7.2 The significance of giving a ‘voice’ to subjugated communities

Currently in India there is a move within the Dalit community to press for equality of opportunity and for social justice in society. For example, many young educated Dalit in Mumbai and Delhi are calling for equal rights through various organisations and pressure groups that have been formed to increase socio-political awareness of the Dalit community (Jogdand, 2007). Groups such as the Dalit Youth Republican and Dalit Sangharsh Samiti organizations are active and well organized

in urban settings. There is also a concerted attempt to raise awareness of Dalit oppression through various media outlets. Prasad and Gaijan (2007) claim that “Dalit writers strive to [...] bring progress in the lives of the ignored classes [i.e., the Dalits] through their literary creations [and] through Dalit literature” (p. 183). Rao (2009) adds that “new educational opportunities [and] urban migration [have] all contributed to Dalits’ newfound ability to demand civic and political rights” (p. 13). As well as awareness raising, there are also a number of small, politically active organisations such as the Dalit Sena that are motivated by the need to secure political representation for Dalits’ social rights (Burra, 1996; Michael, 2007, p. 35; see also Chapter 2). Thus, there is organized political pressure for change.

Although awareness of the Dalits’ situation has increased as a result of the literature published by Dalit organisations seeking liberation and equal rights (Michael, 2007), this ‘improvement’ is not straightforward. The Dalit caste is the single largest minority-caste group in India, yet divisions are growing within the group itself. As I have argued in chapter eight, the Dalit are a heterogeneous community; one that is marked by complex internal differentiation. Thus, there are questions about the structure of the Dalit caste and social justice; for example, who controls the management and administrative sections of the organisations working on behalf of the Dalits’ rights? Do such organisations represent the privileged creamy-layer fraction of the caste, or the poorer Dalit? What role do mainstream, mainly urbanized Dalit organisations play in the upliftment, development and social transformation of poorer Dalit from less privileged rural villages, relative to those who have migrated to large cities? Which members of the Dalit caste are able to voice their opinions most effectively? Do the poorer Quota Dalit in urban areas or their creamy-layer counterparts receive greater attention and support? All of these are crucial questions to investigate.

In general terms, the discrimination faced by the Dalits continues to be daunting, even in contemporary India. Clearly, therefore, more effort is necessary to identify,

encourage and support the many under-privileged members of the Dalit caste. In order to address the needs of this community adequately, the Indian government should:

- Give the Dalit a stronger ‘voice’ by allowing them to promote and represent their collective world-view and individual experiences to Indian society at large (for example, through live television media, film, documentaries, etc.).
- Listen to, accept, empower, support and involve members of the Dalit caste in the cultural, religious, educational, political and economic spheres of Indian society.
- Offer adequate representation to Dalit from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds in rural and urban areas, who strive to secure an equitable life in social, economic and educational terms.
- Seek to improve the state of knowledge about the Dalit community in order to recognise its heterogeneity and accommodate the many complexities and differences that arise from sub-caste, class, regional, linguistic and other kinds of diversity, all of which require increased awareness if the Dalit are to move forward.
- Develop the provision of support and aid to the many deprived Dalits in remote rural regions, as well as those residing in poorer sections of large cities across different states in India.

In addition to the government’s Quota System, which assists (some) Dalits’ access to private educational institutions, non-profit and public organisations need to develop and/or expand strategies to facilitate and sustain Dalit upliftment, both nationally and internationally. Support from independent organisations for human development, and social inclusion especially in the field of education, could be facilitated by the creation of more scholarships and the government could implement additional policies to assist the educational participation and progress of the Dalits, and thereby increase the likelihood of their future employment. For

instance, corporations could provide independently administered scholarship funds for aspiring Dalits from less privileged backgrounds. The creation of government policies for Dalit development and protection, and the raising of public awareness about the situation of the Dalit caste, are major social, political, educational, economic and cultural imperatives. Although the Dalit have progressed to a certain extent, the question remains as to who will take responsibility for representing and supporting this oppressed community – as Dr. Ambedkar did so vociferously almost 65 years ago – and how such action will be taken in today's India.

9.8 Concluding Remarks

My thesis has sought to shed light on the role of the Quota System in increasing Dalits' access to university places in India. It examines the difficulties involved in the implementation of Quota policies, given the caste bias which prevails both within the higher educational system and in Indian society more broadly. After as many as sixty years' worth of Quota reservations designed to improve Dalit access to and participation in higher education, the Quota policy continues to be contested, even with India's new economic development on the international stage.

Analysis of the data obtained in the course of my research has identified certain important issues raised by Dalit respondents as deriving from their personal experiences. A key theme running through all of my data is caste bias, and the victimisation of Dalits at various levels. This study goes some way towards suggesting that the University of Shah Jahan has a 'veiled' admissions procedure, which results in non-Dalit students' finding it easier to enrol on sought-after courses than students from the Dalit community (Jogdand, 2007). The impetus to assist the social, economic and political development of the Dalit community through educational support remains remarkably lacking in India's learning culture. Despite

this, however, it should be noted that, on a larger scale, the responses of both Dalit and non-Dalit participants in this study indicate that the Quota System is still a major source of resentment for non-Dalit, who view the policy as unfair to aspiring non-Dalit students seeking a place of study in the elite University of Shah Jahan. The politics surrounding this issue are illustrated by a range of empirical evidence, with the interviews documented in the four relevant chapters (Chapter 5 to Chapter 8) providing direct evidence of this manoeuvring.

Critics are likely to argue that, as members of a premier university setting, the Dalits interviewed for this study (whether creamy-layer or Quota) enjoy greater privileges than many other Dalits in India, especially those living in rural regions, who continue to be deprived of the higher educational opportunities available to the Dalits at the University of Shah Jahan. It is certainly reasonable to assume that the Dalit studying at Shah Jahan are part of an advantaged cohort. However, this study – using the research questions outlined earlier; see Chapter 4 – has sought to explore not the theoretical but the actual experiences of Dalits within a premier university environment. The research has shed light on the many challenges and pitfalls that Dalit students and faculty members continue to face at Shah Jahan on the grounds of caste – regardless of their individual positions (creamy-layer or Quota Dalit) or backgrounds (rural or urban).

In many ways, my thesis has been framed by an exploration of normative assumptions. One of these concerns the capability of policy to produce straightforward solutions to social problems (Ball, 2012). The Quota System policy has existed for almost 60 years, in various complex forms, and facing various kinds of resistance. Given this, and moreover the symbolic importance of the scheme as both a mode of inclusion and a necessary corrective in a democratic society, it would perhaps be naïve to expect straightforward ‘outcomes’ in terms of linear advancement or progress. Nonetheless, there have been gains over time. The

assumption that policy is capable of solving problems, rather than simply throwing up new ones, is thus supported by the data gathered for this thesis (Verloo, 2007).

Second, normative assumptions about the role of democratic but elite institutions such as the University of Shah Jahan, and expectations of neutrality, tolerance and justice, might seem similarly naïve in the light of the situated and contingent experiences of the Dalit (staff and students) interviewed for my thesis. Another concern relates to the unreasonable supposition that one inequality can be somehow bracketed off from other inequalities (gender, class and other dimensions of caste, for instance).

This thesis has explored the experiences of Dalits at the University of Shah Jahan, with particular reference to Dalit students and faculty members, and issues relating to gender. It has identified exclusion as an experience permeating every aspect of the respondents' lives at university, and of which there are all too many examples. For me, the pressing question raised by this thesis is as follows: if individuals look to universities as safe havens and places for learning and growth, what measures must universities in India take to ensure a safe, non-discriminatory environment for all – including the Dalit? What kind of long-term measures should be implemented? Should the Quota System remain, or should other educational policies be introduced to defend the rights of Dalit students and faculty members who look to these elite universities (as well as other higher learning institutions) as beacons of hope for their future growth and development? How and when will the Indian government and the Supreme Court provide constitutional recognition of the universal right to social justice, and offer their protection to the ostracised Dalit community, as well as other minorities? If universities in India continue to fail to accommodate individual rights, then the higher educational system as a whole needs more scrutiny by researchers to examine and question the values upheld by universities for the benefit of future learning generations.

We are all, to a greater or lesser extent, part of today's global culture of education, which requires that governments accept and adjust to the changing nature and demands of higher education. As a matter of importance and urgency, higher educational ministers and policy makers in the Indian government and administrative sectors should take greater account of caste values, cultures and traditions which differ from their own sets of beliefs. The failures of India's constitutional Quota policy must be understood both as due to "state-sponsorship of oppression" and as the result of a mindset that "denies sociability and social inclusion" (Narula, 2008, p. 55). The second pressing question, therefore, is as follows: if an elite university like Shah Jahan allows inequality and exclusionary practices to persist, what is the situation in India's other higher educational institutions? What kinds of values and cultural expectations do they uphold?

This study has used the experiences of Dalit students and faculty in higher education (specifically the University of Shah Jahan) in order to make visible the impact of the Quota policy. Improvements to the application and monitoring of policies and legislation by India's Ministry of Education could help to combat discriminatory behaviour and thus set the stage for the growth and development of other impoverished Dalit minorities across India. Constitutional laws that make provision for the rigorous monitoring of Quota reservations could have profoundly positive consequences for the coming generations of Dalits, transforming their experience of higher education. The introduction of educational strategies which recognise the motivations and needs of the Dalit community could provide structural opportunities for their empowerment and development in the future. Although such measures may take time to develop, with their effects felt slowly and gradually, the failure to rectify the current situation will only worsen the Dalits' experiences of education, allowing their exclusion to become an ever-more diffuse and amorphous phenomenon, and increasing the scope of social injustice in India.

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Samson Oviehegan
The Department of Education & Professional Studies
16th July 2009



APPENDIX A: Ethical Approval

Dear Samson,

REP(EM)/08/09-79 'The Dalit Experience of Access and Progression in Higher Education: An investigative Study in one High-Status University'

Thank you for sending in the amendments requested to the above project. I am pleased to inform you that these meet the requirements of the E&M Research Ethics Panel and that full approval is now granted.

Please ensure that you follow all relevant guidance as laid out in the King's College London *Guidelines on Good Practice in Academic Research*

(http://www.kcl.ac.uk/college/policyzone/attachments/good_practice_May_08_FIN_AL.pdf)

For your information ethical approval is granted until 31st July 2012. If you need approval beyond this point you will need to apply for an extension to approval at least two weeks prior to this explaining why the extension is needed, (please note however that a full re-application will not be necessary unless the protocol has changed). You should also note that if your approval is for one year, you will not be sent a reminder when it is due to lapse.

If you do not start the project within three months of this letter please contact the Research Ethics Office. Should you need to modify the project or request an extension to approval you will need approval for this and should follow the guidance relating to modifying approved applications:

<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/research/ethics/applicants/modifications.html>

Any unforeseen ethical problems arising during the course of the project should be reported to the approving committee/panel. In the event of an untoward event or an adverse reaction a full report must be made to the Chairman of the approving committee/review panel within one week of the incident.

Please would you also note that we may, for the purposes of audit, contact you from time to time to ascertain the status of your research.

If you have any query about any aspect of this ethical approval, please contact your panel/committee administrator in the first instance

(<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/research/ethics/contacts.html>). We wish you every success with this work.

With best wishes
Yours sincerely

Daniel Butcher (Research Ethics Administrator)

APPENDIX B: Information Sheet

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

REC Protocol Number: [INSERT ONCE PROVIDED BY REVIEW BODY]

KING'S
College
LONDON

University of London

STUDY TITLE: The Dalit Experience of Access and Progression in Higher Education: An Investigative Study in one High-Status University.

I would like to invite you to participate in this postgraduate research project. You should only participate if you want to; choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

The aim of this research is to:

1. Explore, examine and understand the experiences of *Dalit* (students- male/female, and faculty) in University settings.
2. Investigate any impact of caste and any influences on the implementation of the Quota System for *Dalit* students and *Dalit* faculty.
3. Provide a basis for a critical review of the contemporary *Dalit* situation in Indian high-status universities.

I intend to collect the views and experiences of 55 individuals through a set of one to one, in-depth interviews. The interview will be carried out at a venue chosen by the interviewee. Interview sessions will be based on semi-structured open-ended questions and will take approximately 60-90 minutes. The interview is intended to be an opportunity for respondents to talk about their personal experiences at the participating university. The interview will be tape recorded and will be translated and transcribed into text form.

As part of the presentation of the results, respondents own words may be used in text form. To maintain confidentiality names will be altered to maintain anonymity, so that respondents (or any institutions) cannot be identified from what is said.

Please note that as a participant of the research study:

- You can decide to stop the interview at any point
- You need not answer questions which you do not wish to
- Anything you tell me will be absolutely confidential. Your name will be removed from the information and used in an anonymous form.
- Recordings of interviews will be deleted from audio recorder upon transcription.

It is up to you to decide whether to take part or not. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

If this study has harmed you in any way you can contact King's College London using the details below for further advice and information:

Contact for further information

Professor Meg Maguire
Room # 2/3 - Department of Education and Professional Studies,
School of Social Science and Public Policy,
King's College London,
Waterloo Bridge Wing, 57 Waterloo Road,
London- SE1 9NH

Telephone: +44 (0)20 7848 3150/ Fax: +44 (0)20 7848 3182
Email: meg.maguire@kcl.ac.uk

APPENDIX C: Consent Form

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH STUDIES

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research.

KING'S
College
LONDON

University of London

Title of Study: *The Dalit Experience of Access and Progression in Higher Education:
An Investigative Study in one High-Status University.*

King's College Research Ethics Committee Ref: REP(EM)/08/09-79

- Thank you for considering taking part in this research. The person organizing the research must explain the project to you before you agree to take part.
- If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher before you decide whether to join in. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.
- *I understand that if I decide at any other time during the research that I no longer wish to participate in this project, I can notify the researchers involved and be withdrawn from it immediately without giving any reason. Furthermore, I understand that I will be able to withdraw my data up to the point of publication or up until the point stated on the Information Sheet.*
- *I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes explained to me. I understand that such information will be treated in accordance with the terms of the Data Protection Act 1998.*

Participant's Statement:

I Pravin Khambadwaskar (प्रवीन खंबादवास्कर)

agree that the research project named above has been explained to me to my satisfaction and I agree to take part in the study. I have read both the notes written above and the Information Sheet about the project, and understand what the research study involves.

Researcher's Statement:

I SAMSON OVICHEGAN

Confirm that I have carefully explained the nature, demands and foreseeable risks (where applicable) of the proposed research to the volunteer.

Signed *Dr. S. O. Vichigan*

Date 31/07/2009

APPENDIX D: Interview Questions

Finalised version of the Draft (also used for Pilot study) Semi-structured interview questions: (Lead question in bold – Probes un-bolded)

Questions for Students:

- 1) **Could you tell me a little about your personal background?** (Probes – Where from state/town/village - family - early education etc?).
- 2) **Can you identify any individual or significant event in your formative years that influenced your choices in your educational life?** (Probes - What made you choose your current course/university?).
- 3) **What part (if any) has the Quota system played in your educational career?** (Probes - School, high school, accessing your current place – grants or any other form of support?).
- 4) **Can you tell me about this university and your degree?** (Probe for Institution type - subjects chosen - any break - any regrets - progress so far etc?).
- 5) **Can we talk about your tutors' attitudes towards you? Towards other Dalit students? Towards non-Dalit students?** (Probe for students of both sexes – treatment in class – support – responses to any questions – marks and grades – ask for any examples of the attitudes? How do you think tutors view the Quota system?).
- 6) **Turning to the staff – are there any Dalit on the staff?** (Probe for any awareness of how they experience the University – any Dalit professors etc. Are they supportive of Dalit students?).
- 7) **Can you tell me how you are finding other aspects of life at University?** (Probes - dormitory life – finances – friendships – social life – anything else – any examples? Probe for relationships with Dalit and non-Dalit students? How do students view the Quota system?).
- 8) **Can we talk about student friendships? To what degree does caste play a part in friendship groupings in the university?** (Probes - about any inter-Dalit differences –creamy, etc?).

- 9) **What about gender differences and the Dalit experience of Higher Education?** (Probe - Does being a male/female Dalit student make a difference? Can you give me any examples?).
- 10) **Can we discuss some of the government programmes for Dalit student-welfare? What are your experiences of any of these? What about any of your friends' experiences?** (Probe for - government scholarships, student tuition fees - student accommodations - educational facilities, etc., are being utilised for Dalit - Are the programmes satisfactorily administered?).
- 11) **Can we discuss the differences within the Dalit caste community (that involves students from different Dalit sub-castes)? What are your experiences with other Dalit students- whether creamy-layer or Quota Dalits in Shah Jahan?** (Probes for – internal relations between the Dalit community and its various sub-castes – any problems that exist between Dalit students in Shah Jahan – such as, Dalit students from high, medium and low status degrees – between Dalit males and females, etc?)
- 12) **Turning to the Quota System – is this system doing its job in your view?** (Probes - How could it be improved – Is it still needed – any other comments? Is it working, etc?).
- 13) **Is there anything else you'd like to tell me that we haven't already covered?**

Questions for Dalit Faculty:

- 1) **Could you share with me a little about your background?** (Probes - Where from state/town/village - family - early education, etc?).
- 2) **Can you identify any individual or significant event in your formative years that influenced your choices in your educational life?** (Probes - What made you choose your current course/university?).
- 3) **What part (if any) has the Quota system played in your educational career?** (Probes - school, high school, accessing your current place – grants or any other form of support? Becoming an academic?).
- 4) **Could you tell me about your academic career so far?** (Probes - positions held - any change in the field - defined/ official career path or chance - opportunities (training) to learn and develop competencies (especially for leadership role)- opportunities for Dalit to move up the organisational hierarchy etc?).

- 5) **Could you describe any difficulties you may have encountered in your career advancement? Can you give me any examples? Could this have happened to non Dalit academics in your view?** (Probe on issues of - Dalit professors' academic role – institutional barriers – caste identity – role of culture - positive or negative influence, etc?).
- 6) **Turning to the staff at this university – are there any Dalit on the staff?** (Probe for which departments - any awareness of how they experience the University – any Dalit professors etc.? Are they supportive of Dalit students?).
- 7) **When you got your post here, what were the relations like between non-Dalit and Dalit faculty?** (Probes - Have these changed over time? What are your feelings about Dalit and non-Dalit faculty relations, etc?).
- 8) **Can you comment on the relationships at this university between Dalit and non-Dalit faculty?** (Probes - What kind of issues they face from non-Dalit faculty, such as, staff hierarchy - limited staff interactions – avoidance, etc?).
- 9) **What are your views, if any, on the role of the Quota system for Dalit access to Higher Education?** (Probes - Does the system remain to help Dalit access higher education today?).
- 10) **Do you think that the policy of Quota reservations has fulfilled a useful purpose?** (Probes - Whether government has rendered sufficient resources to meet Dalit needs as constitutionally accorded in the Quota policy of 1952? – whether or not if likely issues are present in resource administration and management, any examples, etc?).
- 11) **Can you share any issues around reserved seats at the University?** (Probe for students – for staff? - What are your feelings about reservations? - Any positive or negative impacts about it - any present challenges or foreseeable issues that could likely rise with the system, etc?).
- 12) **Do you think that caste discrimination is changing at all in India?** (Probes - In what ways? How is this manifested in universities? - Can you give me an example, etc?).
- 13) **Is there anything else you'd like to tell me that we haven't already covered?**

APPENDIX E: Interview Transcript (UNCODED)

Date: August 3rd, 2009 Dr. Khanna

Time: 3:00pm

Venue: University-Faculty Office

Could you describe any difficulties you may have encountered in your career advancement? Can you give me any examples? Could this have happened to non Dalit academics in your view?

K: I always felt inferior and insecure. The feeling was because of being a Dalit. Also, I studied in Marathi language and then later learnt English. So it was hard in the beginning. I learnt English as I received admissions into University and I learnt and worked hard on it.

S: It must have been difficult in beginning?

K: It was...but initially I learnt and overcame the barrier. My schooling was done in Marathi language. No English. I took classes for English. And in terms of career advancement, especially teaching at good Universities (like this one) there are still problems faced by Dalit academics today. They still rule the upper management and administrative level (*looks carefully at the door to see if no one is standing or listening*).

S: It still does??

K: (*speaking softly*) Yes! Caste attitude strongly exists in University settings- even here at this department and other academic departments.

S: Turning to the staff at this university – are there any Dalit on the staff?

K: There is one Dalit staff member apart from me in this department.

K: (*quickly switches to another conversation*) Do you know Kamble is a Dalit name.

S: (surprised) No I don't.

K: Yes! Dalit change their names even today. The name 'Kar' is usually added.

S: You mean Venserkar, Gavaskar are changed names?

K: Before 'Kar' are their village names or town names. They take those town names and add 'kar' to it.

S: Do you mean to say even today Dalit given their original names confront prejudice in the academic department like yours?

K: Oh yes! (*speaking softly, then looking over to the door to see if no one is there*) Oh yes! (*quite firmly*) They experience discrimination without a doubt. It is still prevalent even today.

APPENDIX F: Data Coding

Page -1	Interview – Example of Data Coding
H.E.	S: Could you share with me a little about your background?
<u>Background</u>	K: (smiles) I was raised in a small village. I was the only one who went on to higher education studies. I earned a Masters degree and thereafter secured a PhD in one the most premier institution of India.
Family/ Education	S: (smiles) Wow! K: You know...my parents are illiterate, and I'm the only person in the family to have a degree. I also support my family financially.
	S: Sir, are you the eldest in your family. K: Yes! I send money to my parents and even visit them in their village.
<u>Role Models</u>	S: Can you identify any individual or significant event in your formative years that influenced your choices in your educational life?
Father/ Dr. Ambedkar	K: My father played a significant role in my educational career and gave me Dr. Ambedkar as an example to achieve educational status.
	S: Interesting! (smiles) K: Since then Dr. Ambedkar has been my role model and I proceeded on with my studies and made it to where I'm today.
<u>Quota System</u>	S: What part (if any) has the Quota system played in your educational career?
scholarship	K: I started my higher education in 1973 until 1984. Through scholarships I was able to achieve my degrees.
	S: So, Quota System in the early 70s proved you useful then?
<u>Political Level</u>	K: Yes! It did actually. I was offered scholarships through the Quota System and the system has been helpful to me. Scholarships even today people like me with opportunities benefit it. But there are Dalit who don't.
corruption	S: So the Q.S serves its purpose for a few Dalits and gives them the opportunity to succeed?
	K: Yes! but sometimes the system is not fully implemented because corruption in the management level still exists. I was able to acquire it in the previous years of my study, especially during the early 70s.
<u>Career</u>	S: Could you tell me about your academic career so far?
<u>opportunities/</u>	K: I taught in Aurangabad from 1984-1991, and then in Pune city for 6 years. Then I was appointed at University of Mumbai in 1997 at the Sociology Department which is the oldest dept in the
Teaching in oldest Dept in India	

Page-2	<p>country, formerly established in 1919. So the opportunity to teach in the oldest dept was something I went for.</p> <p>S: (smiling) Wow! That's good.</p> <p>K: (smiles) Yes! I would say as a Dalit this opportunity came by for me and I took the chance.</p>
<u>Emotional feelings</u>	<p>S: (smiles) That is quite an achievement!</p> <p>S: Could you describe any difficulties you may have encountered in your career advancement? Can you give me any examples? Could this have happened to non Dalit academics in your view?</p>
<u>Early education/ career challenges- Dalit faculty</u>	<p>K: I always felt inferior and insecure. The feeling was because of being a Dalit. Also, I studied in Marathi language and then later learnt English. So it was hard in the beginning. I learnt English as I received admissions into University and I learnt and worked hard on it.</p> <p>S: It must have been difficult in the beginning?</p> <p>K: It was...but initially I learnt and overcame the barrier. My schooling was done in Marathi language. No English. I took classes for English. And in terms of career advancement, especially teaching at good Universities (like this one). There are still problems faced by Dalit academics today. They still rule the upper management and administrative level.</p>
<u>Caste issues</u>	<p>S: It still does??</p> <p>K: Yes! Caste attitudes still strongly exists in University settings and the academic dept.</p>
<u>Issues of Inclusion & Exclusion/ Converting to Dalit names</u>	<p>Turning to the staff at this university – are there any Dalit on the staff?</p> <p>K: Do you know Kamble is a Dalit name</p> <p>S: Oh ok!!</p> <p>K: Yes! Dalit change their names even today. The name 'Kar' is usually added.</p>
<u>Discrimination</u>	<p>S: You mean Venserkar, Gavaskar are changed names.</p> <p>K: Before kar are their village names or town names. They take those town names and kar to it.</p> <p>S: Do you mean to say even today Dalit given their original names confront prejudice</p> <p>K: They experience discrimination without a doubt. Still prevalent even today.</p>
<u>Examples of Caste bias/prejudice</u>	<p>When you got your post here, what were the relations like between non-Dalit and Dalit faculty?</p> <p>K: Non Dalit faculty were hesitant of my arrival at first. Since I was a Dalit I was under constant watch and probation. The non-Dalit faculty did not interact much with me, but I did not let them hinder me. Its unfortunate that caste mindset still prevails within educated people too, and they continue to discriminate. Caste tension still prevails. Inspite of my publications non Dalit do not</p>

<p>Page- 3</p> <p><u>Hierarchy issues/Caste-bias attitudes in faculty</u></p> <p><u>Q.S-</u> Positive attribute</p> <p><u>meritocracy/family/daughter</u></p> <p><u>H.E. Institution elite courses-corruption</u></p> <p><u>Access issues</u></p> <p><u>Q.S. benefits-rural/urban divide for resources</u></p> <p><u>Management/abolish caste system/ equality</u></p>	<p>congratulate me or show any signs of gratitude. But I don't let that stop me. I continue to write and address the problems prevailing. Can you comment on the relationships at this university between Dalit and non-Dalit faculty?</p> <p>K: Yes! There is hierarchy.</p> <p>S: Okay</p> <p>K: There is staff interaction but often limited. Heirarchy issues always prevail. The non-Dalits don't like a Dalit in a higher position. Even as a Head of the Department the staff did not respect me or my position.</p> <p>S: Okay</p> <p>K: Only on the face they were cordial, otherwise they wanted me out.</p> <p>What are your views, if any, on the role of the Quota system for Dalit access to Higher Education?</p> <p>K: Quota System compensates. 60 years of empirical evidence shows that it has helped Dalit like me. There are positive attributes of the Quota System and it has helped Dalit like me at this level. Quota System helps Dalit. But let me tell you. The Dalit are equally meritorious too. However, rich non-Dalit have money to pay and get entry into medical school. For example- my daughter could not because I did not have the money for it. However, merit is blown out of proportion and non-Dalit have emphasized that rather strongly and cannivingly. Unfortunately the professional education (medical, engineering, computer, business courses) educational institutions are corrupted. Even today they stand corrupted without any change. Non-Dalit get easy access, whereas Dalit stand facing no access.</p> <p>Do you think that the policy of Quota reservations has fulfilled a useful purpose?</p> <p>K: Government has rendered resources. But not sufficiently. Although the Constitution has accorded it, only a few benefit from it. Rural people do not get the benefits. Only people from urbanised place get it. Of which there are Dalit students too.</p> <p>S: Okay</p> <p>K: Quota System through these 60 years has helped Dalit like me to attain the position I'm in today. However, remember that management is still ruled by non-Dalit and Dalit are still looked down upon. I feel the Quota System should remain to help those Dalit who can't access Higher Education. If the government needs to remove it, then they should abolish the caste system completely and allow Dalit to be looked upon equally with other non Dalit individuals in the society.</p>
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APPENDIX G: Open Coding of Interviews

Dr. Khanna (Dalit Faculty)

Emergent Themes

1) Descriptive Themes (Background) (*Highlighted in Red*)

Family.....	(pg-1)
Education.....	(pg-1)

Role Models: (*Highlighted in Pink*)

- Father.....	(pg-1)
- Dr. Ambedkar.....	(pg-1)

Quota System: (*Highlighted in Blue*)

- Scholarship.....	(pg-1)
- Corruption.....	(pg-1)
- Meritocracy.....	(pg-3)
- H.E. Institution elite courses- corruption.....	(pg-3)
- Access issues/ Q.S. benefits- Rural.....	(pg-3)
- Urban divide for resources.....	(pg-3)
- Management.....	(pg-3)
- Abolish caste system.....	(pg-3)
- Equality.....	(pg-3)

2) Analytical Themes (exclusion, emotional feelings) (*Highlighted in Green*)

- Early education.....	(pg-1)
- Career challenges-caste bias against Dalit faculty.....	(pg-2)
- Caste issues.....	(pg-2)
- Discrimination.....	(pg-2)
- Caste bias-prejudice.....	(pg-2)
- Hierarchy issues.....	(pg-3)
- Educational access.....	(pg-3)

3) Constructs “passing” (name changing, religion changing) (*Highlighted in Yellow*)

- Converting Dalit names to other.....	(pg-2)
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APPENDIX H: Interview Transcript (UNCODED)

Date: September 15th, 2009 – Manisha (Non-Dalit Student)

Time: 12:00pm

Venue: University- Student Room

S: Have you come across any Dalit staff in your education life?

M: In college we had a sir. He was a good teacher. He had some language problems.

S: Vernacular medium you mean?

M: Yeah. He was from a vernacular medium. His language problem sort of irritated a lot of us. He knew the matter, but language was a problem.

S: Otherwise did you feel the students would question him I mean him being from a Dalit community? ... (interrupts)

M: No ...no. But the students had their own way of ragging (teasing) the teacher (then laughs). They would ask him stupid questions. As you know there are some teachers one would not dare speak up to, or even ask silly questions....the boys especially they would stick onto every sentence that he would say or argue with him....those things (interrupts)

S: Not a good thing

M: No

S: These are certain forms of biases

M: Mmmm! (yes).....

S: Can we talk about student friendships? To what degree does caste play a part in friendship groupings in the university?

M: I think like.... Maharashtrians they have their own group. I think in this case it is more interest grouping then caste friendships. Like I'm into theatre ...so I had a group of friends who were into that (theatre). But I had many Maharashtrian friends...I think its' more of the activity we did together and we became friends instead of like being with your own community.

S: So the activities brought most of you together no matter what caste or religion you belonged to?

M: Yes

S: What about gender differences and the Dalit experience of Higher Education? Do you feel that Dalit females face hardship, problems or even people making fun of them, or passing comments...those sort of things. Have you ever come across such situations?

M: No.....

S: Do u think the Quota system is really doing its job?

M: For me it is that Quota system in some place it does work and some place it doesn't work. There are Quotas in higher education

S: Yes

M: Like after you pass you 10th you have the Quota system for college. Actually most of them (Dalit) don't have the base. The education base is not done well.

APPENDIX I: Interview Data Coding

Page- 1	Interview – Example of Data Coding	
<p>Personal thoughts- <u>Ignorant/</u> <u>uneasy</u></p> <p><u>Dalit friend</u></p> <p><u>Prejudice</u></p> <p><u>language issue</u></p> <p><u>vernacular dialect</u></p> <p><u>ragging- teasing/stupid questions/argue</u></p>	<p>S: What do you think about the Quota System issues? M: There a lot of issues. The entire thing starts after school. I did not know more about Quota System. I was a bit ignorant. I felt uneasy when you try for college admissions especially St. Xaviers (Premier college) and you get a good percentage....but then realize that a person of Dalit community gets the admission. So there is that uneasiness. That churning in your head starts. So basically this is very personal.... S: True M: I became comfortable with the whole Quota System when I started to understand that these (Dalit) people need it, and some don't. Some people take advantage of it..... S: Yes S: In your school have you come across any Dalit student? M: In colleges I had friends. One of my best friend is a Dalit S: How would others view her? M: There are some who have racist attitudes....sorry not racist. Prejudiced attitudes. Some had issues with her...but when they know her they like her. She is a good friend of mine S: Being friends with her..... did it make others feel uneasy or anything like that? M: She was pretty popular. Not a big deal S: None at all S: Have you come across any Dalit staff in your education life? M: In college we had a sir. He was a good teacher. He had some language problems. S: Vernacular medium you mean? M: Yeah. He was from a vernacular medium. His language problem sort of irritated a lot of us. He new the matter, but language was a problem. S: Otherwise did you feel the students would question him I mean him being from a Dalit community?...(interrupts) M: No ...no. But the students had their own way of ragging (teasing) the teacher (then laughs). They would ask him stupid questions. As you know there are some</p>	

<p><u>Page 2</u></p> <p><u>Bias</u></p> <p><u>Encouragement/lack sound education/Parents uneducated</u></p> <p>Misuse of monetary sources/Advantage/Economic level/review income/raise bar</p> <p><u>No quota seats for educated Dalit</u></p> <p><u>Prejudice/merit</u> Income level/grade level</p> <p><u>Inequality</u></p>	<p>teachers one would not dare speak up to, or even ask silly questions....the boys especially they would stick onto every sentence that he would say or argue with him...those things (interrupts)</p> <p>S: Not a good thing</p> <p>M: No</p> <p>S: These are certain forms of biases</p> <p>M: Mmmm! (yes).....</p> <p>S: Anything you have in your mind about the Quota System...higher education.....?</p> <p>M: I think you need the quota system. It is necessary....there are some who need it and some don't. Some don't come from good educational background...they should have the benefit ...some whose parents are not that educated....I think those interested should be encouraged</p> <p>S: Exactly.</p> <p>M: So I think removing the quota system completely will be on those people. Some people take advantage. It high time one starts taking into consideration the economic level of the Dalit ...review income like the criteria for Quota System.....I think they have to raise the bar...because I think some of them even if they have they somehow manage to show their income under 1 lakh (100,000 Rupees). We have to do something.</p> <p>S: Do you think that the government focus is very less on primary education for Dalit as opposed to higher education</p> <p>M: Yes...because if they have education ...because if they educated well they won't need the quota that badly. More rural education is needed.</p> <p>S: If the Quota System is removed do you think as a non Dalit that equality will exist...if no why?</p> <p>M: (smiles) it will not exist. In the end prejudice is there.....some level of social prejudice which they will face. I think the QS is imp because as a non-Dalit we have the education privileges...I mean the Dalit don't have the privileges....they don't have the social status to get the right education...Quota System is important..I'm for it...but it should be on merit...on their (Dalit) merit....it should be based on income and if someone who gets 60-65% fine... but if someone who gets 55% or 45%... I'm sorry....</p> <p>S: Do you think inequality and resentment still exists in</p>	
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	subtle forms by non Dalit towards Dalit in terms of education access? M: Yes	
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APPENDIX J: Open Coding of Interviews

Manisha (Non-Dalit Student)

Emergent Themes

1) Descriptive Themes (Background)

Quota System: (*Highlighted in Blue*)

- lack sound education/Parents uneducated.....(pg-2)
- Misuse of monetary resources.....(pg-2)
- Advantage.....(pg-2)
- Economic level.....(pg-2)
- Review income/raise income level bar.....(pg-2)
- No quota seats for educated.....(pg-2)
- Prejudice/merit.....(pg-2)

2) Analytical Themes (exclusion, emotional feelings)- Highlighted in Green

- Ignorant.....(pg-1)
- Uneasy.....(pg-1)
- Dalit friend..... (pg-1)
- Prejudice.....(pg-1)
- Language issue/vernacular dialect (formal exclusion).....(pg-1)
- Ragging-teasing/stupid questions/argue.....(pg-1)
- Bias.....(pg-2)
- Encouragement.....(pg-2)
- Inequality.....(pg-2)
- Dalit-intelligence.....(pg-2)

APPENDIX K: Table on Number of Student Participants and Courses

COURSES

Courses/Status	Dalit Students		Non-Dalit Students		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
<u><i>Lower Status Subjects</i></u>					1	5
Psychology	1	4				
Sociology	5	3			6	3
History	7	3			7	3
<u><i>Medium Status Subject</i></u>					2	1
Law	2	1				
<u><i>Better Status Subject</i></u>						
Business/ Management	5				5	
<u><i>Elite Status Subjects</i></u>						
Engineering	2	1	1	1	3	1
Chemistry	2	2		1	2	3
Medicine	1	1	1		1	1
Total	25	15	2	2	27	17

TOTAL=44

APPENDIX L: Tables on Dalit Enrolment in Education

Percentage of Enrolment of Dalit (SC/ST) Students in Higher Education after Independence in India

<i>Level of education</i>	<i>Scheduled Castes</i>				<i>Scheduled Tribes</i>			
Higher Education	1960-61	1965-66	1978-79	2002-03	1960-61	1965-66	1978-79	2002-03
(a) General	5.1	4.8	8.1	11.3	1.0	1.2	1.8	3.5
(b) Professional	-	4.8	7.8	6.6	-	0.9	2.1	3.1
(c) Vocational (ITI Trainees etc)	-	7.6	13.3	9.8	-	2.4	3.5	3.9

Sources: 1. *Education in India*, for 1960-61 and 65-66, Ministry of Education.
 2. Government of India, *A Hand Book of Educational and Allied Statistics*, Delhi, 1983 and 2002-03.

Dalit Students Enrolment: Faculty-Wise*: 2010-2011

SI.NO.	Faculty	Total Enrolment	Percentage
1	Arts	6177730	36.39
2	Science	3127042	18.42
3	Commerce/Management	2904752	17.11
4	Education	569961	3.36
5	Engineering/Technology	2862439	16.86
6	Medicine	652533	3.85
7	Agriculture	93166	0.55
8	Veterinary Science	27423	0.16
9	Law	327146	1.93
10	Others	232691	1.37
	Total	16974883	100.00

* - *Provisional*

Source: Annual Report on Dalit: 2010-2011, p. 302

Dalit (Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes) Population, 1961 TO 2001

Year	Person	Male	Female
1961	94,394,783	48,004,486	46,390,297
1971	118,020,560	59,524,644	57,495,916
1981	156,383,261	80,249,059	76,134,132
1991	205,981,657	106,292,231	99,689,426
2001	250,961,940	128,729,589	122,232,351

Source: Census of India. Selected Educational Statistics 2004-2005. Government of India. MHRD. New Delhi, p. 44

**Enrolment of Dalit (Scheduled Castes) in Schools, 1980-81 to 2004-05
(Fig. in 000')**

	Primary (I-V)			Middle/Upper Primary (VI-VIII)			Sec./Sr. Secondary (IX-XII)		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
1980-81	7213	3768	10981	1621	602	2223	906	246	1152
1981-82	7413	3930	11343	1777	677	2454	973	273	1246
1982-83	7807	4244	12051	1906	741	2647	1091	330	1421
1983-84	8001	4472	12473	2297	999	3296	1395	382	1777
1984-85	8040	4651	12691	2543	1123	3666	1524	429	1953
1985-86	8727	5194	13921	2537	1082	3619	1378	432	1810
1986-87	7871	4655	12526	2315	1099	3414	1090	376	1466
1987-88	9083	5593	14676	2543	1193	3736	1521	507	2028
1988-89	9431	5771	15202	2584	1257	3841	1546	557	2103
1989-90	9523	5877	15400	2623	1298	3921	1701	630	2331
1990-91	9737	6057	15794	2747	1413	4160	1703	635	2338
1991-92	9709	6328	16037	3137	1556	4693	1878	703	2581
1992-93	10317	7034	17351	3478	1933	5411	1822	709	2531
1993-94	10412	7169	17581	3566	2014	5580	1981	827	2808
1994-95	10889	7543	18432	3330	1883	5213	1788	803	2591
1995-96	11284	7892	19176	3453	1992	5445	1854	887	2741
1996-97	11754	8368	20122	3621	2176	5797	1952	975	2927
1997-98	12104	8759	20863	3825	2299	6124	2042	1050	3092
1998-99	12453	9185	21638	3918	2505	6423	2255	1221	3476
1999-00*	11810	8625	20435	3881	2420	6301	2385	1399	3784
2001-01*	12059	9136	21195	4066	2628	6694	2418	1394	3812
2001-02*	12251	9253	21504	4551	2945	7496	2693	1622	4314
2002-03*	11943	9726	21669	4430	3062	7492	2776	1624	4400
2003-04*	12764	10365	23129	4734	3343	8077	2938	1522	4760
2004-05*	13762	10995	24757	5100	3597	8697	3228	1990	5218

* - *Provisional*

Source: Selected Educational Statistics 2004-2005. Government of India. MHRD. Department of Higher Education Statistics Division. New Delhi, p. 20

Enrolment of Dalits (Scheduled Tribes) in Schools, 1980-81 to 2004-05

(Fig. in 000')

	Primary (I-V)			Middle/Upper Primary (VI-VIII)			Sec./Sr. Secondary (IX-XII)		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
1980-81	3133	1527	4660	537	205	742	246	83	329
1981-82	3293	1628	4921	603	232	835	265	93	358
1982-83	3540	1791	5331	663	263	926	302	110	412
1983-84	3765	1964	5729	758	299	1057	318	109	427
1984-85	3949	210	4059	866	350	1216	386	135	521
1985-86	4174	2406	6580	893	390	1283	420	165	585
1986-87	4150	2407	6557	988	446	1434	413	144	557
1987-88	4606	2623	7229	1008	447	1455	446	165	611
1988-89	4837	2759	7596	1037	466	1503	501	215	716
1989-90	4948	2850	7798	1075	494	1569	553	244	797
1990-91	4958	2911	7869	1131	576	1707	567	238	805
1991-92	4951	3082	8033	1214	580	1794	590	253	843
1992-93	5032	3333	8365	1336	693	2029	610	272	882
1993-94	5154	3441	8595	1424	770	2194	682	315	997
1994-95	5454	3605	9059	1377	871	2248	779	350	1129
1995-96	5589	3826	9415	1448	837	2285	763	359	1122
1996-97	5896	4057	9953	1508	894	2402	790	385	1175
1997-98	6141	4311	10452	1643	996	2639	823	417	1240
1998-99	6225	4452	10677	1698	1026	2724	909	464	1373
1999-00*	6139	4511	10650	1804	1101	2905	918	504	1422
2001-01*	6330	4665	10995	1879	1205	3084	855	535	1490
2001-02*	6691	5040	11731	2054	1306	3360	1079	622	1701
2002-03*	6422	5408	11830	1930	1320	3250	1105	678	1783
2003-04*	6776	5741	12517	2136	1526	3662	1222	729	1951
2004-05*	7367	6369	13737	2395	1776	4171	1290	795	2085

* - *Provisional*

Source: Selected Educational Statistics 2004-2005. Government of India. MHRD. Department of Higher Education Statistics Division. New Delhi, 2007, p. 24

APPENDIX M: Letter to the Head of Department

Name: Samson K. Ovicegan

Degree Programme: Ph.D in Education Research (King's College London)

Supervisor: Professor. Meg Maguire

King's College London, School of Social Science and Public Policy

Department of Education and Professional Studies

Franklin Wilkins Building, Waterloo, London- SE1 9NH

**Subject: “The Dalit Experience of Access and Progression in Higher Education:
An Investigative Study in one High-Status University (working title)”**

Dear Head of Department (HOD),

My name is Samson Ovicegan and I am currently studying for my PhD (Educational Research) degree at King's College London, U.K.

To begin with, my interest in the Dalit caste initially stemmed in 1998, when I first got an opportunity to attend a large Dalit Conference, held in New Jersey, U.S. My long time mentor and Professor (Dr. Stefan) had invited me to this conference, acknowledging my interest in equality and social justice issues. After the conference lectures, together with Professor Stefan, I engaged in close conversations with Dalit activists who through their personal experiences and knowledge further enlightened me of the acute situation that many Dalits like them continue to face, in spite of socio-economic development and progress of India within the global stage.

In view of the Dalit situation in India, for my research study I am eager to explore the Dalit (students & faculty) experiences, primarily focussing on the experiences of Dalit faculty members and students in higher education, here at the University of Shah Jahan. Therefore, I have attached 2 copies - one copy is an Information Sheet explaining my research interest, and the second copy is a Consent Form for participants who wish to participate in the one-to-one interview sessions. In line with King's Ethics Committee, I assure you that the interview responses will not be disclosed to anyone, and will respect the anonymity and confidentiality of all the Dalit faculty and student respondents participating in this research study.

Your kind cooperation is most humbly and earnestly requested. I sincerely hope that you would kindly offer assistance, co-operation and guidance towards my research study that I wish to further explore and analyse.

Thanking you for your time and patience.

Yours Sincerely,
Samson Ovicegan